

Université de Montréal

**Between Pragmatism and the Defence of a “Sister State:”  
The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
and the U.S. Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1922**

par

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## Résumé

À l'origine, la nouvelle concernant l'occupation américaine d'Haïti en 1915 a suscité peu d'indignation aux États-Unis. En effet, on reproche à la république son instabilité politique et on juge aussi qu'une intervention américaine concourrait à l'édifice de l'autorité de la loi. À partir de 1915 et surtout en 1920, l'Association nationale pour l'avancement des gens de couleur (NAACP), fondée en 1909, critique cette ingérence et milite pour y voir un terme. W.E. B. Du Bois et James Weldon Johnson, deux figures publiques noires importantes travaillant au sein de l'organisation, dénoncent avec conviction l'occupation d'Haïti. Les historiens ont jusqu'ici jugé que la NAACP fut inspirée par des considérations de solidarité raciale en adhérant à la cause de la souveraineté haïtienne. Si la thèse présente ne réfute pas cette possibilité, elle cherche tout de même à démontrer que le cadre conceptuel de la solidarité raciale ne saurait illustrer toute la complexité de la campagne haïtienne érigée par la NAACP. Par conséquent, une attention dirigée davantage sur le contexte social et politique américain entre 1915 et 1922 révèle que pour la NAACP, la dénonciation de l'occupation américaine d'Haïti représentait d'une part une opportunité de discuter des problèmes sociaux touchant les Afro-Américains, et d'autre part, une occasion de renforcer sa position aux États-Unis.

**Mots-clés :** NAACP, HAÏTI, OCCUPATION AMÉRICAINE D'HAÏTI 1915, POLITIQUES ÉTRANGÈRES AMÉRICAINES, SOLIDARITÉ NOIRE, INTERNATIONALISME NOIR

## **Abstract**

Initially, the news of the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1915 generated little concern in the United States. Indeed, Haiti's political instability made it such that a U.S. intervention seemed unavoidable. As of 1915 and especially 1920, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, denounced the U.S. interference in the Caribbean island. W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, two of the association's most influential black members, were deeply invested in condemning the U.S. occupation of Haiti. Historiographical tendencies have long located the NAACP's engagement with Haiti in a conversation about black solidarity, but have failed to adequately consider the local politics that may have inspired the NAACP's work. While this thesis does not refute the importance of black solidarity, it does recognise the limits of this conceptual approach in trying to explain the complexity of the NAACP's work on the behalf of Haiti's sovereignty. Placing more attention on the social and political context in the United States between 1915 and 1922 reveals that the NAACP utilised the occupation of Haiti as a means of attracting broader attention to domestic issues affecting black Americans, but also as a means of reinforcing the organisation's own profile in the United States.

**Keywords :** NAACP, HAITI, U.S. OCCUPATION OF HAITI 1915, U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, BLACK SOLIDARITY, BLACK INTERNATIONALISM

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## **List of Acronyms**

NAACP : The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

UNIA : Universal Negro Improvement Association

UP : Union Patriotique

*For Mom*

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# Introduction

## 1. Context

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1915, Haiti was again in the midst of a bloody revolution. Following the assassination of over a hundred political prisoners, supposedly on governmental orders, an angry mob broke international law by pulling President Guillaume Sam out of the French legation where he had been in hiding.<sup>1</sup> After seizing him, the group proceeded to execute him and dismember his body. The mob then paraded the remains of the fallen President through the streets of Port-au-Prince in a gory spectacle.<sup>2</sup> A few hours later, taking advantage of the confusion that accompanied Guillaume Sam's assassination, American Rear Admiral William Banks Caperton, aboard the USS Washington, seized the capital.<sup>3</sup> This was the beginning of a nineteen-year military occupation of Haiti by the United States.

The assassination of Guillaume Sam largely served as a pretext for an American intervention in Haiti. Yet, the quasi-anarchist nature of the Haitian political landscape since the late nineteenth century made it so that few prominent voices in the United States opposed the occupation when it began in 1915. At the time, the American intervention seemed justifiable to restore order. Historian John W. Blassingame suggests that most influential American newspapers of the time held that "the black republic clearly proved...[that] civilization deteriorated when Negroes did not have the guidance of aggressive, intelligent Anglo-Saxons."<sup>4</sup> The American public generally accepted this view as irrefutable, especially in light of Haiti's latest bloody coup d'état.

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<sup>1</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Joseph Grieb, *The Latin American Policy of Warren G. Harding* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 85.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Blassingame, "The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920," *Caribbean Studies* 9, no. 2 (July 1, 1969): 29-30.

For black Americans, however, feelings towards “the black republic” were less uniformed. Despite the great achievements of the Haitian Revolution and its implications for the black diaspora, most nineteenth-century black intellectuals looked unfavourably at the country since it had not achieved any great level of self-government, and such attitude continued well-into the next century.<sup>5</sup>

This sentiment towards Haiti was displayed by early African American reactions to the occupation. Noted black educator and orator Booker T. Washington felt the occupation of Haiti was “absolutely necessary.”<sup>6</sup> The black leader believed that “Haitians themselves [were] largely at fault for their present unhappy conditions.”<sup>7</sup> From the late 1890s to the time of his death (less than a month after making his thoughts on Haiti public), Washington had been one of the most influential African Americans in the United States. Widely read and respected among both whites and blacks, his views captivated a large segment of the U.S. black population.

Notwithstanding Washington’s authority, some did come to oppose American pursuits in Haiti. One of the leading black American organisations to do so was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Other black associations and religious groups, too, eventually condemned American involvement in Haiti. Nonetheless, the NAACP was among the first to proceed in this direction, and it was the most important organisation of its kind in the United States. It counted among its key members W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, both of whom, following Washington’s death, also became among the most influential black individuals of their time.

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<sup>5</sup> Lisa G. Materson, “African American Women’s Global Journeys and the Construction of Cross-Ethnic Racial Identity,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Special Issue on Circling the Globe: International Feminism Reconsidered, 1910 to 1975, 32, no. 1 (January 2009): 39.

<sup>6</sup> Booker T. Washington and Louis R. Harlan, *The Booker T. Washington Papers: 1914-15* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 395.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

Since its foundation in 1909, the NAACP was instrumental in black activism in the United States. Between anti-lynching campaigns targeting racial prejudices in the American South and efforts to better the conditions of African Americans living in Northern cities, the NAACP was an integral part of black civil life in the 1910s. It largely rejected the conciliatory philosophy of Booker T. Washington and argued rather that African Americans should be more assertive in demanding their civil rights. By the next decade, with the end of the First World War, the Great Migration from the South, the Race Riots of 1919, and other changes in global politics, the organisation expended its activities beyond the strictly domestic realm. In this respect, the occupation of Haiti provided one of the first instances when a black organisation assertively expressed its views on a question of U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, between 1915 and 1922—though especially starting in 1920 with a full-scale investigation—the NAACP played a key role in challenging the discourse of “benevolent interventionism” put forth by the Wilson administration and its supporters to justify occupations elsewhere such as in Cuba and Puerto Rico.<sup>8</sup> While the occupation of Haiti continued until 1934, it was during this interval that the NAACP deployed its greatest efforts at speaking about Haiti’s sovereignty. By 1922, different factors and the deeper institutionalisation of the Haitian occupation by the Harding administration made it so that the NAACP’s work in denouncing U.S. activities in the country greatly diminished.

The 1920s were also significant for what scholars have called the Black International or black internationalism.<sup>9</sup> There was a direct correlation between this new reality and the question of the occupation of Haiti. Whether in London, Paris, Harlem, or elsewhere, individuals of the black diaspora were in a continuous dialogue. It was in this global environment that the Harlem

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Angela Renda, “‘This American Africa’: Cultural Dimensions of U.S. Imperialism in Haiti, 1915-1940” (Ph.D diss., Yale University, 1993), 121.

<sup>9</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5-7.

Renaissance in the United States and the *Négritude* movement among French West Indians and Africans living in Paris came into existence. It was also in this context that the sentiments sparked by the first Pan-African Conference led by the Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams in 1900 could be revitalised in 1919 with the Pan-African Congress largely organised by W.E.B. Du Bois of NAACP. All of this helped create an ideal theatre where the type of activism performed by the NAACP on the behalf of Haiti became more significant.

Historians have largely focussed on the NAACP's crusades against lynching, its adversarial relation with Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and other related concerns about the NAACP's importance within U.S. society.<sup>10</sup> Less attention, however, has been paid to the extent to which the organisation's ambitions propelled it into transnational campaigns and how its international stance then became integral to its work within the United States. Indeed, while the NAACP's activism against the U.S. occupation of Haiti occurred in the context of a global framework that facilitated and even encouraged black solidarity, this thesis will demonstrate that the association's work was not divorced from domestic concerns.

As the first U.S. troops arrived in Haiti in 1915, the NAACP was already deeply dissatisfied with the administration of Democrat president Woodrow Wilson. It found the Southern-born president generally indifferent to the plight of African Americans and poorly disposed to assist the NAACP in its fight for black civil rights. The NAACP also found Washington's position on combatting anarchy in Haiti hypocritical, given Washington's inactivity in the face of violent crimes committed by white mobs against African Americans in the United States on a daily basis.

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<sup>10</sup> The Universal Negro Improvement Association was a radical black organisation founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914 in Jamaica. Soon after Garvey's arrival in New York in 1916, he began creating branches in the United States. Aside from its greater grassroots appeal, the radicalism UNIA began to pose a series ideological threats to the NAACP. For an account of the rivalry between the UNIA and the NAACP see Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*, (Dover, Mass: The Majority Press, 1986), 274.

Thus, the occupation of Haiti quickly became a channel through which the NAACP could discuss U.S. politics by pointing out such evident contradictions.

## **2. Research Question**

This thesis examines the manner in which the interaction between the NAACP and Haiti unfolded between 1915 and 1922 and poses the following central question: *in what context has the NAACP, through figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, voiced its concerns about questions of American foreign policy in dealing specifically with a “coloured” nation?* This thesis will argue that, while the NAACP’s activism might have been predicated on feelings of racial solidarity, the association utilised the occupation of Haiti as a means of attracting broader attention to domestic issues affecting black Americans, but also as a means of bolstering the organisation’s own public image.

Historiographical tendencies have long located the NAACP’s engagement with Haiti in a conversation about black internationalism, but have failed to adequately consider the local politics that may have inspired the NAACP’s work. If this thesis does not refute the importance of racial solidarity given that the NAACP *did*, at various times, frame the occupation of Haiti as a display of white American racism exported abroad, it wishes to better trace the contours of black solidarity and show how the occupation of Haiti offered a practical framework in which to place criticism about the Wilson administration treatment of racial questions and demand new reforms from the subsequent government.

Moreover, this thesis evaluates the NAACP’s own infrastructural considerations in condemning the occupation of Haiti. As an association that first had to prove itself a worthy alternative to Booker T. Washington’s conciliatory view of race relations and that faced fierce

competition from other, similar black organisations, the NAACP was conscious of the importance of finding new campaigns to deploy its savoir-faire in accordance with its mandate. With Haiti, it found an avenue to condemn the Wilson administration, but also a key opportunity to forge a relationship with Republicans and then aspiring president, Senator Warren G. Harding.

### **3. Relevance of the Research Topic**

Although there is still debate about whether the NAACP was really a “black organisation,” especially in its earlier years, this thesis draws on historian Mark Robert Schneider’s position in discussing the matter. Indeed, many have argued that associations like the UNIA held a greater grassroots appeal and were more acutely aware of the African American of humble means, as opposed to the NAACP, which was seen as an organ of white progressives and middle-class African Americans.<sup>11</sup> Schneider, for his part, maintains that such an evaluation is defective and does not account for the important changes that the NAACP underwent in the decades leading to and following World War One. According to Schneider, the NAACP was built by both black and white liberals, notably by many of the same individuals who were involved in W.E.B. Du Bois’ failed Niagara Movement, a black civil rights organisation and precursor of the NAACP.<sup>12</sup> As Schneider points out, its “board of directors was indeed one of the few integrated bodies in the United States.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, early in its existence, the association became home to leading voices on questions of black civil rights, from W.E.B. Du Bois, as one of its founding members and its director of publicity and research, to James Weldon Johnson, who became its first black executive secretary in late 1919. While they worked in close collaboration with other members, they were

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Robert Schneider, *“We Return Fighting”: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern, 2001), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

all able to rise individually and assert the association's place as the most important and best-organised activist group for African American civil rights.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, to refer to the NAACP as a black organisation does not obscure the fact that its membership was not exclusively black and that its readership was mixed. Rather, it speaks to the fact that many of its most important members, like Du Bois and Johnson, were black and tried to represent black American interests and welfare. The NAACP was at the heart of every major controversy that touched on black American life at that time. If it did not embrace the radicalism or back-to-Africa tenor of the UNIA, it was still seen as a vital element of black American life during the 1920s. As of 1919, its journalistic organ, *The Crisis*, sold close to 100 000 copies per year in cities with an important black population,<sup>15</sup> making it one of the most circulated publications of its time dedicated to issues relevant to black Americans. Given these considerations, it becomes easier to appreciate why this particular thesis relates to the NAACP as a black organisation.

While several scholars have touched on the NAACP-Haiti encounter during the 1920s, more research is needed to better understand this relationship. This thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive assessment of the relationship between the NAACP and Haiti, but it does move beyond the question of black internationalism in order to appreciate the 1915-1922 period as something more than a romantic encounter between black Americans and Haitians. In so doing, it wants to analyse some of the association's own motives in condemning the occupation of Haiti and in building a relationship with the Republican Party.

The particular domestic context in which the NAACP's denunciations of the U.S. occupation occurred is important to properly understand the association's motivations in criticising

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 40.

the U.S. occupation of Haiti. The NAACP's response to the U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1922 was not continuous, and it reflected different views in U.S. society. As the second chapter of this thesis demonstrates, while W.E.B. Du Bois published much on the subject of Haiti from 1915 to 1916 in the NAACP's *Crisis*, by the time of the U.S. entry into the war, Haiti had mostly disappeared from the magazine until 1920. Moreover, in those instances when Du Bois did write about Haiti, he used it and Wilson's foreign policy to make parallels with the degrading situation of black Americans in the U.S., thereby exposing Wilson as a bigoted leader both on the national and international stage.

From 1920 to 1922, the NAACP had become more vocal in denouncing U.S. activities in Haiti, yet, much like in earlier periods, this devotion to Haiti happened at a time when the association was undergoing very specific changes. As the NAACP's new executive secretary, James Weldon Johnson was well-aware that the Republican Party was interested in using the question of U.S. Marine abuses in Haiti to their political advantage. It is likely that in supplying them with information about the country, Johnson was attempting to establish closer ties with the Party—especially with Senator Warren Harding who was the Republican candidate for the 1920 presidential election. If Harding was to win the election, a positive relationship with him could be useful for the NAACP in their struggle for visibility and legitimacy in U.S. society. It is by giving closer scrutiny to changes in U.S. society that may have impacted the NAACP's work on the Haitian occupation that this thesis wishes to situate itself.



#### 4. State of Scholarship

To understand the broader historiography concerned with the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the scholarly debates that relate to the NAACP-Haiti relationship between 1915 and 1922, the literature overview will be divided into two sections in order to reflect these two subjects.

##### 4.1 On the Occupation of Haiti

Scholars who have studied the occupation of Haiti have traditionally focussed their attention on the political and economic aspects of the endeavour. They have centred their debates on questions of empire building, overseas “progressive imperialism,” and benevolent paternalism. As such, the main historiographical narrative regarding the U.S. occupation of Haiti usually treats the intervention as part of a larger discussion about American expansionist enterprises in Latin America and the Caribbean basin. This is seen particularly in the case of *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Grenada* (1990) by Ivan Musicant, with *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (1998) by Lars Schoultz, or with *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934* (2001) by Lester D. Langley.

In contrast, fewer monographs have dealt exclusively with the case of the Haitian occupation. A seminal work on this subject is Hans Schmidt’s *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (1971). Like other authors, Schmidt sees the occupation of Haiti as an aspect of American imperialism. However, he isolates the Haitian case and maintains that the U.S. occupied Haiti to satisfy a set of short-term and long-term goals. The short-term goal, according to Schmidt,

was to dissuade German interests from taking control of the island.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that, since the late nineteenth century, adventurous German nationals had been at the heart of many controversies in Latin American and Caribbean countries, like Venezuela and Haiti.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, given the United States' posture with its Monroe Doctrine and the late Roosevelt Corollary of 1904,<sup>18</sup> it took the "German menace" seriously. Still according to Schmidt, the intervention in Haiti was also part of a large-scale strategy to ensure complete control over hemispheric affairs.<sup>19</sup> Since the Spanish-American war of 1898, which secured de facto independence for Cuba under American tutelage, the United States had been more aggressive in its dealings with Southern republics. In addition to acquiring Puerto Rico that same year, the United States also seized control of Dominican customhouses in 1905, installed military occupations in Nicaragua in 1907, and in Haiti in 1915, and then in the Dominican Republic in 1916.<sup>20</sup>

What distinguished the Haitian occupation from other U.S. interventions in Latin America, aside from its long duration, was the extent to which it was predicated on racism and prejudices against Haitians. Schmidt argues that "racist preconceptions...placed Haitians far below levels Americans considered necessary for democracy, self-government and constitutionalism."<sup>21</sup> As such, the author questions whether the intervention could have been politically successful.

In *L'Occupation Américaine d'Haïti*, originally published as a PhD dissertation in 1973 for the *National Autonomous University* of Mexico and then translated into French in 1988, Suzy Castor analyses the occupation of Haiti with close attention to the political, economical, and social

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<sup>16</sup> Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, Reprint edition (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Séphocle, "Germany's Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine," *Pouvoirs Dans La Caraïbe. Revue Du CRPLC*, no. 13 (January 1, 2002): 187.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter one of this thesis for a more detailed explanation on U.S. policies in Latin America and Haiti before the 1915 intervention.

<sup>19</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

contingencies surrounding the intervention. As opposed to Schmidt, Castor attempts to replace the occupation in the national histories of Haiti and of the United States. She takes particular care to explain how the occupation affected the daily lives of the Haitian élite and the lower classes. In 1973, when Castor was completing her dissertation, the legacies of American imperialism in Haiti were apparent. Haiti possessed only a few local industries, and its export-based economy greatly favoured the United States. Unlike Schmidt, who credited the occupation at least for minimal infrastructural improvements, Castor viewed it as an economic miscarriage,<sup>22</sup> which never secured a comparable success to U.S. interventions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, largely because of the American failure to understand the differences in economy and land tenure in Haiti compared to its immediate neighbours.<sup>23</sup>

Another major study on the occupation of Haiti is cultural historian Mary A. Renda's *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (2001). In this provocative work, Renda argues that paternalism was a central feature of the 1915 U.S. intervention. Renda describes paternalism as "an assertion of authority, superiority and control expressed in the metaphor of a father's relationship with his children."<sup>24</sup> Further, she argues that it is "a form of domination, a relation of power, masked as benevolent by its reference to paternal care and guidance, but structured equally by norms of paternal authority and discipline."<sup>25</sup> In such a context, where the occupation of Haiti could be interpreted as American benevolence and paternalist solicitude, violence on the hands of Marines could be justified.

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<sup>22</sup> Suzy Castor, *L'Occupation Americaine* (Port-au-Prince: Société Haïtienne D'Histoire, 1988), 135.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

By focussing on more than just the individual experiences of Marines posted in Haiti, Renda demonstrates that paternalist attitudes towards Haiti affected the whole of U.S. society. Through Marine memoirs, plays, films, and other ventures, Haiti offered a “series of exotic commodities”<sup>26</sup> for the consumption of Americans, including those who had never even ventured to the island.

#### **4.2 On the NAACP and Haiti**

As suggested before, African American attitudes towards the occupation of Haiti in 1915 were, for the most part, in tune with other U.S. citizens’ sensibilities of the time. They began to change, however, by the end of the First World War. As this section will demonstrate, many scholars attributed this change to the NAACP’s efforts to denounce the occupation as an example of U.S. imperialism.

In “James Weldon Johnson and Haiti” (1971), Rayford W. Logan expresses this view and argues that James Weldon Johnson’s writings from 1920, published in *The Nation* and *The Crisis*, had a definitive impact on changing American perspectives about the occupation.<sup>27</sup> While they did not bring about a reversal of Washington’s procedures in Haiti, they did serve to create a public setting in which the occupation of Haiti could be discussed beyond questions of benevolence and future economic prosperity for the poor Caribbean island. Moreover, these articles provoked a debate about bigotry in the Marines and racism in Haiti. This thesis will demonstrate that, while Logan put little emphasis on the domestic context, which may help explain the NAACP’s work in this period, his assertions about Johnson’s work and their impact were indeed correct.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>27</sup> Rayford W. Logan, “James Weldon Johnson and Haiti,” *Phylon* (1960-) 32, no. 4 (December 1, 1971): 396.

Brenda Gayle Plummer, who has closely studied triangular relations between Haiti, the State Department, and African Americans corroborates many of Logan's conclusions. In "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934" (1984), Plummer describes Johnson as the key figure in denouncing the brutality of U.S. rule in Haiti. She argues that his motives can best be explained by the changing nature of black internationalism during the interwar period.<sup>28</sup> With the shifting situation of black Americans in the U.S. and their move away from conciliatory attitudes towards racism, their assessment of the U.S. occupation greatly changed. Johnson's articles served a key role in this course. Ultimately, like most scholars, Plummer views black solidarity as the main force driving African American and NAACP opposition to the U.S. occupation. While this thesis does not wish to discount this possibility, as far as the NAACP was concerned, it does show that the association's considerations went beyond the realm of racial affinity.

William Gibbs builds on much of Logan's and Plummer's arguments. Though Gibbs provides a detailed study of James Weldon Johnson's career as a composer and as a diplomatic figure in Latin America, including his serving as U.S. consul in Nicaragua before the occupation of Haiti,<sup>29</sup> his article, "James Weldon Johnson: A Black Perspective on 'Big Stick' Diplomacy" (1984), traces how these experiences prepared him for his functions as executive secretary of the NAACP. Like other authors, Gibbs maintains that interests in the affairs of Haiti can in part be explained by what he calls "colour affinity."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Gibbs admits that "colour affinity" was closely related to national matters and that "Afro-American commentary on foreign affairs

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<sup>28</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," *Phylon* (1960-) 43, no. 2 (June 1, 1982): 125.

<sup>29</sup> William E. Gibbs, "James Weldon Johnson: A Black Perspective on 'Big Stick' Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 8, no. 4 (October 1, 1984): 332.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

also reflected the domestic plight of American blacks.”<sup>31</sup> This thesis will build on Gibbs’ argument in order to trace the manner in which the NAACP’s Haitian campaign was connected to its domestic affairs in the United States.

In “The NAACP and the Occupation of Haiti” but also in *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope* (1986, 2001), Dénis L. Pamphile links African Americans and Haitians through a bound of colour solidarity in the interwar period. In his book, Pamphile states that “the occupation of Haiti coincided with the rise of black nationalism in America, a period of self-assessment.”<sup>32</sup> The period of the occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) partly corresponds with the New Negro Movement in the United States, which began in the 1920s. Pamphile does suggest that, in the context of a new “self-assessment,” African Americans came to see the occupation of Haiti as directly connected to their destinies through a racial conscientiousness. However, Pamphile provides little nuance for the NAACP’s interests in Haiti, and he suggests that the work of the association can largely be explained by radicalised solidarity. This thesis will demonstrate why this understanding of the NAACP’s investment in Haiti until 1922 obscures many of the motivations behind the actions of the association.

Historian Mark Robert Schneider shares a small degree of Pamphile’s enthusiasm for interwar black internationalism. In a chapter of “*We Return Fighting*”: *The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (2002) that discusses the growth and importance of the NAACP in black American life in the 1920s, the author approaches the question of Haiti and James Weldon Johnson’s special participation. While Johnson did involve himself personally with the Haitian affair by visiting the island and by writing articles for *The Nation* and *The Crisis* in 1920, Schneider sees these as

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Leon D. Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 103.

serving more immediate and local purposes. Schneider argues that “the NAACP tried to raise its own profile on the domestic front”<sup>33</sup> with the Haitian issue. While Schneider’s assertions paint a less flattering portrait of the association’s motivations, given the extent to which the NAACP’s articles involved themselves in the question of the Haitian occupation, and the fact that Haiti largely faded from its pressing concerns after 1922, Schneider statements do seem plausible. This thesis will also build on Schneider’s argument and examine the particular dynamics between local and international politics on the question of the NAACP’s involvement in the Haitian occupation between 1915 and 1922.

## **5. Sources and Methodology**

In placing the NAACP’s activism in condemning the U.S. occupation primarily in a conceptual framework of black internationalism, most scholars have tended to obscure the possibility that the associations’ work might have also reflected more concrete political and opportunistic goals. Although black internationalism provides an attractive explanation and accounts for one aspect of the association’s attention to Haiti, this unilateral assessment fails to capture the various theoretical nuances of the association’s work for Haiti. Closer attention to relevant archival sources reveals a more complex portrait of the Haitian question and speaks to the NAACP’s position as an association that, while interested in the defence of coloured people, also cared about securing its own national interests.

The most valuable primary sources for this research are the NAACP Papers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, which are now available on microfilm. The set comprises all of the private papers of the organisation for the period covered in this study. It includes letters

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<sup>33</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 2001, 87.

sent between members of the NAACP, but also material addressed to other actors in U.S. civil society. These Papers also contain key correspondences between James Weldon Johnson and then Republican presidential candidate Warren Harding. As this thesis will show, Johnson and Harding established a mutually beneficial working relationship in 1920. Johnson and Harding met and corresponded at key moments in 1920 and discussed the occupation of Haiti and the ways it could be used to spark a scandal and embarrass the Democrats. The NAACP Papers thus shed light on Johnson's complicity and engagement in denouncing the occupation of Haiti.

If Johnson made Haiti a *cause célèbre* by the fall 1920, Du Bois should be credited for being one of the earliest black voices to question the occupation. In August 1915, he sent a letter to president Wilson expressing his opinion on the state of affairs in Haiti. A close examination of the documents contained in the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst reveal much about Du Bois' complex views regarding Haiti. The Papers also suggest that, like Johnson, Du Bois was concerned with the implications of the occupation of Haiti for domestic racial politics in the United States.

This thesis also draws on the NAACP's own weekly magazine *The Crisis*. Edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, the magazine's earlier instalments have been digitalised by the Modernist Journal Project curated by Brown University. Early in the occupation, Du Bois used the editorial section of the magazine to criticise Washington's policies in Haiti. While scholars have traditionally attributed Du Bois' position to a deep concern for fellow coloured people, this thesis argues that the occupation of Haiti also gave Du Bois the occasion to comment on social problems affecting black Americans under the Wilson administration, most notably lynching, which had become one of the key social evils the NAACP was invested in fighting. *The Crisis* thus provides a rich source



for understanding the NAACP's criticism of the occupation and the link between domestic and international politics during the Wilson administration.

Before further exposing his report on the Haitian situation in *The Crisis*, Johnson had already published articles in the progressive newspaper *The Nation*. At the time, *The Nation* was owned by Oswald Garrison Villard and edited by Ernest Gruening. Both men were close to the NAACP, Villard having been one of its founding members and its disbursing treasurer. Throughout the occupation of Haiti, *The Nation* remained critical of the role of the U.S. on the island and it gave Johnson a key venue to present his Haitian investigation. As mentioned before, scholars have maintained that Johnson's articles had a definitive impact on changing American attitudes regarding the occupation. Yet, it remains to be explained how successful these articles were in critiquing Wilson's policies and how Warren Harding was able to take advantage of this during the 1920 presidential election campaign.

Aside from publications directly related to the NAACP, this study will also make use of a brief selection of articles from the *New York Times*. At the time of the occupation of Haiti, the *New York Times* was already established as one of the most vital journals in the United States. Its views represented and influenced important individuals in American society. While the *New York Times* made the occupation seem utterly acceptable in July 1915, by late 1920, following declarations made in James Weldon Johnson's articles, its tenor became more confused about the regarding the occupation. The newspaper is thus useful for its consistent reports on the developments regarding the Haitian occupation during the fall 1920 when Haiti was heavily discussed in the press.

During his time in Haiti, Johnson met with Haitians of all walks of life, but most notably with influential individuals capable of bringing a change to their country. One of these individuals was the Haitian lawyer and former diplomat George Sylvain. In August 1915, after the Americans

took control of the Haitian government, Sylvain, aided by a group of distinguished, like-minded people, began the *Union Patriotique* to protest the occupation and demand a full return of Haitian sovereignty. With the suppression of any dissident press, the *Union Patriotique* soon aborted all activities. In 1920, however, following correspondences and meetings between Sylvain and Johnson, the two were able to re-vitalise the association. Historians have long referred to the meeting and possible friendship between the two men but have not commented on how both Johnson and Sylvain might have also established a mutually beneficial friendship. This will be discussed in the third chapter of this thesis through a close examination of the correspondence between Johnson and Sylvain compiled in *Dix Années de Lutte pour la Liberté, 1915-1925*.

Altogether, these sources will contribute to a fuller portrait of the NAACP's engagement on the Haitian question. They help challenge the view that the efforts of the members of the NAACP to confront U.S. imperialism can be understood solely in terms of racial solidarity.

## **6. Structure**

This thesis is comprised of three chapters. Chapter One focuses on an overview of the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the first decade of the NAACP's history. This chapter provides much needed context for understanding the onset of the U.S. occupation of Haiti by explaining overall changes in American and Haitian society on the eve of 1915. Chapter One also outlines key moments in the history of the NAACP preceding the occupation of Haiti. The rapid degradation of social conditions for black Americans both in the North and South made the creation of an association capable of defending black civil right more pressing. While Du Bois had previous experience with such undertakings, notably with the Niagara movement in 1905, it took the work of both white and black progressives to establish the NAACP in February 1909. The NAACP

positioned itself as a challenge to Booker T. Washington and his followers who advocated for vocational education and the acceptance of black subjugation. Those early years were formative for the association's attempts to gain grassroots appeal and in building a comprehensive program for black civil rights.

Notwithstanding a busy domestic agenda, the association did comment on the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1915. Chapter Two analyses the first phase of NAACP involvement in the Haitian question, between 1915 and 1919. In addition to discussing in detail W.E.B. Du Bois' letter to Woodrow Wilson of August 3, 1915, this chapter puts particular emphasis on the articles from *The Crisis*, especially editorial pieces in which Du Bois articulates his ideas about Washington's initiatives in Haiti. Although, in the October edition of *The Crisis*, Du Bois makes clear how "shameful" the occupation of Haiti is and urges African Americans to write to President Wilson in protest,<sup>34</sup> a closer examination of Du Bois' writings on the occupation reveals that he largely utilised the occupation of Haiti to bring awareness to domestic issues affecting African Americans, particularly the problem of lynching.

While James Weldon Johnson's training in the diplomatic world and his position in the *New York Age* may have inspired his earlier assessment of the U.S. military occupation of Haiti as a necessity, by the end of the decade, his feelings had changed. In late 1919, he took on new responsibilities as the first black executive secretary of the NAACP and left for Haiti the following year. Between March and May of the same year, he conducted a detailed investigation of the material condition in Haiti. Once back in the United States, he published his findings in *The Nation* and *The Crisis*. Chapter Three thus focuses on a second phase of NAACP engagement with the publication and impact of Johnson's articles, between 1920 and 1922. This chapter argues that

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<sup>34</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Hayti," *The Crisis*, October 1915, 281.

beyond the question of the immediate denunciation of the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the many abuses regarding the intervention that the Democratic Party had kept away from the public, much like Du Bois, Johnson also understood the value of Haiti as a political tool.

Historian Mark Robert Schneider contends that the NAACP used the occupation of Haiti to gain prestige inside the United States. The association worked in very close collaboration with Republicans and particularly with Warren Harding, who, at the time, was a candidate for the 1920 presidential election. A close examination at Johnson's relationship with Harding reveals how both men looked at the Haitian affair somewhat opportunistically. This chapter therefore will analyse Johnson's and the NAACP's complex positions regarding the Haiti issue and show how this campaign may have helped strengthen its position in the United States.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Haiti and the NAACP on the eve of the United States occupation**

*“The object of this publication [The Crisis] is to set forth those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested to-day toward colored people. It takes its name from the fact that the editors believe that this is a critical time in the history of the advancement of men. Editorial, The Crisis, November 1910, 10.*

In an effort to understand the particular problem advanced in this thesis, this first chapter will pursue a dual analysis of, on the one hand, the shifting foreign policy of the United States in relation to Haiti as of the late nineteenth century and, on the other hand, the overall changing social dynamics that brought about the creation of an association such as the NAACP. Hence, to fully comprehend why the present thesis relates to the NAACP's engagement in the Haitian affair as one that may have been inspired by racial solidarity, but that remained grounded inside domestic politics, it is imperative to understand the general geo-political context in which the occupation of Haiti unfolded but also, to appreciate what brought into being the sedimentation of an organisation such as the NAACP and why it, in turn, showed an interest in U.S. policies in Haiti.

A brief survey of American-Haitian relations serves to better contextualise how the violent events of July 1915, which brought about the death of Vilbrun Guillaume Sam (then president of Haiti), hardly explain Washington's desire to occupy the country. As stated before, the occupation was part of long-term policies, which affected the entire Latin American and Caribbean basin. Where the occupation of Haiti distinguishes itself from other such ventures is the *extent to which* it was predicated on the American racist and essentialist understanding of Haiti and its people. This was not lost on the influential black members of the NAACP such as W.E.B. Du Bois and later James Weldon Johnson, as they both publicly framed the occupation of Haiti as an act of American racism exported abroad.

When the 1915 U.S. intervention began in Haiti, the NAACP was still in its infancy. Founded in 1909, it had come to oppose the philosophy and activities of Booker T. Washington and had gained substantial public presence with campaigns against lynching and against D. W. Griffith's classic silent and racist film *Birth of a Nation*. Despite those early efforts, it was conscious of competition from other such organisations interested in defending American blacks. Consequently, the need to find new battles to deploy its savoir-faire was always present and as the years advanced, it found such opportunity with the beginning of the U.S. occupation of Haiti. This thesis explores the association's activism against the occupation of Haiti as part of a larger set of strategies to gain visibility in the United States by fighting campaigns, which were related to its overall mandate of advancing the cause of "colored" people. This first chapter is thus interested in laying the foundations necessary to understanding both the positions of Haiti and the NAACP on the eve of the United States occupation.

### **1.1 A Manifest imperialism: The United States as a hemispheric hegemon**

The story of the United States becoming a world power usually begins with the end of the Second World War, yet most scholars that have given attention to U.S. foreign policy in relation to Latin America date the shift from "isolationism" to a more assertive role in hemispheric politics to the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> From the late 1880s, to the onset of the First World War, the United States played a significant role in the domestic politics of Southern republics. Perhaps the most transformative episode in this respect was the crushing American victory following the Spanish-American war of 1898, during William McKinley's presidency. With this new triumph, the United States not only destroyed some of the last vestiges of Spanish colonialism

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<sup>35</sup> See for instance Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

in the Americas, but it also placed Cuba in a state of practical tutelage. What follows of US-Latin American relations until the First World War has generally been termed the “banana wars” by U.S. foreign policy and Latin Americanist scholars, a title which links economic and political interests in the region.<sup>36</sup>

Following McKinley’s assassination in 1901 and Theodore Roosevelt’s ascendancy to the presidency, the United States pushed its imperialist logic further. As stressed by many historians, Roosevelt’s impact on the American cultural imagination is significant. With daily stories of his “manly” exploits and his beliefs in an increased need for young men to “prove themselves” through physical force and military service,<sup>37</sup> accepting the logic of white Anglo-Saxon superiority and American imperialism overseas was not contradictory to the United States’ pledge to liberal and democratic values. As such, just as regulating the movements of African Americans domestically was essential to the United States’ policies, so was affirming its authority overseas. Like black Americans, who had yet to see the realisation of the promises brought by the end of the American Civil War in 1865, Latin Americans who came from “inferior” races had to accept white American domination as a form of paternalist generosity.<sup>38</sup>

Roosevelt’s most notable policy transformation in regard to hemispheric affairs was arguably his 1904 corollary to the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. Though the latter made clear that the United States would not accept European efforts to further colonise the Americas or interfere in the affairs of sovereign states of the region, the corollary, for its part, indicated that the United

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<sup>36</sup> See for instance Ivan Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990) and Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934*, (Wilmington: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Bruce Fehn, “Theodore Roosevelt and American Masculinity,” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 2 (March 1, 2005): 52.

<sup>38</sup> Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 90.

States would act as an “overseer” to compel South American states into paying their debts to European investors and bondholders. As expressed by scholars Kris James Mitchener and Marc Weidenmier, “the corollary stated that the American government would ensure that Central and Latin American countries repaid their debts and that the United States would act as the region’s policeman to ensure peace and stability.”<sup>39</sup>

While Mitchener and Weidenmier generally view the Roosevelt Corollary positively, as it did help settle many countries’ on-going debts,<sup>40</sup> such consideration seems to obscure the fact that American activities in the region became more forceful with time. Moreover, a strictly economic-oriented investigation conceals the larger consideration of American-perceived racial superiority over “uncivilized” people.<sup>41</sup> Hence, from an American perspective – and this especially when examining the particular racist tenure of the occupation of Haiti – economic interests and the need for the United States’ own civilising mission were not contradictory goals and in fact, informed each other.

Crucial to American interventions was the re-organisation of what were alleged primitive economic models. In the case of Haiti, this meant a complete restructuring of the Haitian economy and the writing of a new constitution. Hans Schmidt highlights that the occupation of Haiti coupled with the redeployment of Haitian political, social, and economic policies were not accompanied by any sense of mutual respect,<sup>42</sup> and instead, sat on piles of pre-conceived ideas about the country. American diplomatic manoeuvres were thus engrained in strategic interest, but also in racism.

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<sup>39</sup> Kris James Mitchener and Marc Weidenmier, “Empire, Public Goods, and the Roosevelt Corollary,” *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 03 (2005): 658.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 670.

<sup>41</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 8.



The desire to limit European control over Latin American financial and political affairs, the United States' own rise as an industrial power, and the professed backwardness of Latin American peoples, all contributed to and reinforced U.S. imperialist outlook. Schmidt notes that "as [it] had been the case in the Pacific, the American expansion into the Caribbean [and Latin America] began with the commercial adventures and culminated in territorial acquisitions and military invasions."<sup>43</sup> Although the two presidents differed with their domestic agendas, William Howard Taft's foreign policy, in regard to Latin American republics, conflicted little with that of Roosevelt. The "Dollar Diplomacy," usually associated with Taft's secretary of state, Philander C. Knox, attempted to promote financial stability abroad and encouraged American investment overseas. It placed great importance on banking institutions, on large companies and on American support for *favourable* regimes. Like Roosevelt, Taft's ideas of economic opportunism and modernisation went hand in hand with racism. At best, Latin American republics were underdeveloped and their economic methods not adapted to the times. At worst, its people were too immature and needed guidance from large American banks and corporations.<sup>44</sup>

In 1913, when Woodrow Wilson became president of the United States, little had changed in the overall orientation of American activities in Latin America. That Wilson, who had criticised the policies of his predecessors in Latin America and who would speak about making the world "safe for democracy" after the First World War, could have become one of the United States' most interventionist presidents may appear as a surprise.<sup>45</sup> Yet, much like Roosevelt and Taft, Wilson could not resolve American liberalism and policy orientation in Latin America in a way which did not place Latin Americans as subordinates in the need for American's supervision. If such

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>44</sup> Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 83.

<sup>45</sup> Ross A. Kennedy, *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 206.

supervision was not for the sake of responding to the needs for larger markets for American goods, at the very least, it was to protect the United States, whose very position and security were supposedly threatened by the domestic situations in various Latin American states.<sup>46</sup>

In Haiti, Washington's immediate objective was to remove German presence from the country.<sup>47</sup> While most historians today agree that the United States may have exaggerated the "German threat" in regard to any take down of Haiti's sovereignty, such evaluation, at the time, may not have been well-defined. As Haiti became impoverished and its various generals competed for the presidency, the omnipresence of European merchants, particularly Germans, in the financing of revolutions gave cause for alarm.<sup>48</sup> German interference in Haitian domestic affairs went directly against the logic of the United States' policies for the small Caribbean Republic and therefore, had to be averted.

Preceding the American's occupation in 1915 was the battle for control of the Haitian National Bank. In this particular incident, Haiti fell prey to foreign pressures in part due to its internal politics. Prior to 1910, France was the principal country with formal involvement in the country. In 1880, the French *Société Générale de Crédit Industriel et Commercial* secured the first concessions for the creation of the *Banque Nationale d'Haïti* (BNH).<sup>49</sup> In 1910, the bank was the object of a series of controversies due to fraudulent dealings. Antoine Simon, then president of the country, established a new charter for the bank, which was re-baptised *Banque Nationale de la République d'Haïti* (BNRH).<sup>50</sup> In essence, very little had changed from the BNH to the BNRH.

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<sup>46</sup> Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 377.

<sup>47</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> In 1902, for example, Haitian General Pierre Nord Alexis succeeded his opponent Tirésias Simon Sam in the presidential office thanks to German backing. See David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, Revised edition (New Brunswick: Scholarly Book Services Inc, 2002), 140.

<sup>49</sup> Peter James Hudson, "The National City Bank of New York and Haiti, 1909 – 1922," *Radical History Review* 2013, no. 115 (December 21, 2013): 97.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

The bank still controlled most of Haitian finances and acted as the government's wallet. The real transformation was that the institution, previously dominated by French, German and some American interests, was now more fully controlled by the National City Bank of New York.<sup>51</sup> In essence, whichever power controlled the Haitian Bank, ultimately controlled the Haitian state and by extension, Haiti itself. In all disagreements between foreign interest and the New York City group, Washington came to support the New York City Bank's actions. In the 1910 disputes – using the logic of the Monroe Doctrine and more recent U.S. development in the region such as Dollar Diplomacy – the U.S. largely assisted the New York City Bank in taking a firmer grip on the Haitian bank and in removing French and German interests.<sup>52</sup> The confrontation for the control of the Haitian bank was thus the first true episode of the U.S. occupation of Haiti.

## **1.2 A difficult turn of the century: Political instability in Haiti**

The political situation in Haiti greatly deteriorated over the years leading to the American intervention and may help explain why the country could no longer hold on to its sovereignty by July of 1915. Since Jean-Pierre Boyer's demise in 1843, few Haitian heads of state were able to complete their terms. Likewise, while the island had once enjoyed some economic prosperity in the first decades of the nineteenth century, by the 1900s, the situation was largely reversed.<sup>53</sup> Haiti tried to protect itself from attempts by alien nationals to pressure it into surrendering its fragile

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<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that, Roger Farnham, the New York City Bank's vice president, was also the head of concessions for Haiti's railroad system. Farnham had long desired a strong American foothold in Haiti, which would have guaranteed the success of his activities. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 36-41.

<sup>52</sup> Hudson, "The National City Bank of New York and Haiti, 1909 – 1922," 98.

<sup>53</sup> Haiti's economy deteriorated and entered its downward spiral in the 1890s in part because of dropping coffee prices and because the country export-based economy could no longer compete with bigger markets like that of Brazil. See Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of the Caribbean since the Napoleonic Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2-3.

sovereignty with constitutional clauses that barred foreigners from owning land. This was more difficult as the years progressed and inter-marriage with the Haitian elites became a means by which such laws could be overturned.<sup>54</sup> German merchants especially, who by 1912 had become such a vital presence in Port-au-Prince that a German school was opened in the Haitian capital, used this tactic.<sup>55</sup> Although many different factors (that go beyond the scope of this research) help to explain this, for the purpose of this thesis, it is important to understand that as the twentieth century began, political stability in Haiti was almost nonexistent.

The years immediately preceding the occupation were perhaps the most volatile. From 1908 to 1915, seven presidents came and went, almost all of whom were deposed through violent revolutions and one of them (Cincinnatus Leconte) was blown up in the explosion of the Haitian National Palace in 1912.<sup>56</sup> By 1914, an American intervention seemed more and more plausible. Following the *U.S.S. Machias*' seizure of the BNRH's gold reserves in December of that same year,<sup>57</sup> the United States demonstrated its slight regard for Haitian sovereignty and made its overall intentions evident. By this point, a minor accident was needed to make any eventual operation appear legitimate in the eyes of international law and American public opinion. This opportunity came with the bloody assassination of Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam.

Like most Haitian leaders of the day, Sam's ascent to power was the result of a military campaign. Needing to solidify his authority by pacifying the opposition, the new president went on to purge his opponents. On July 27, 1915, 167 political prisoners were butchered in Port-au-Prince's central prison.<sup>58</sup> Although it seems unclear whether these killings were the result of Sam's

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 143.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Langley, *The Banana Wars*, 119.

<sup>57</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 60.

<sup>58</sup> Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 91.

reluctant approval or if they represented direct instructions from the president, the result was the same. The vengeful families of the victims stormed Port-au-Prince and finally the French legation where Sam was hiding in a bathroom. The rest of this story is well known.<sup>59</sup>

The spectacle of Sam's dismemberment was closely observed by American troops that were already present in Haitian waters. They did not require further encouragement. On the morning of July 28, 1915, Rear Admiral William B. Caperton and his men began to occupy Port-au-Prince. Once in the city, Americans faced little resistance. The Haitian army was poorly prepared against the much better equipped American military. Likewise, residents in Port-au-Prince had yet to make sense of the formidable pace at which violence had escalated in the past two days. In this seeming confusion, Haitian officials established a *Comité révolutionnaire*.<sup>60</sup> Americans, despite their pledge to work peacefully with Haitians, had no intentions of negotiating in any way that would not be favourable to their own interests.<sup>61</sup> The *Comité* was soon overturned. In the days immediately following the July 28<sup>th</sup> assault, American forces disarmed remaining tenants of the Haitian army.<sup>62</sup> By August 7, 1915, a declaration by Captain E. Beach announced that the United States would take *temporary* control of the country.<sup>63</sup> In reality, this signaled the formal occupation of the second oldest Republic of the Americas.

As these events took place in the Caribbean and in the United States, the NAACP was concerned with the domestic problems such as lynching and a campaign to have the featured film *Birth of a Nation* boycotted. Although it did call for a mission to study the Haitian situation in August of 1915 (as will be detailed in the next chapter), its formal condemnation of the occupation

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Georges Corvington, *Port-au-Prince au cours des ans (1915 - 1934) Tome III: La capitale d'Haiti sous l'occupation* (Montreal: Cidihca, 2004), 9.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 12.

came only in October of the same year. By then, both the organisation and the Caribbean Republic had experienced profound transformations in a relatively short interval.

The rapid deterioration of African Americans' material and social conditions both North and South since the end of the Reconstruction era<sup>64</sup> made the need for an association capable of challenging social and racial inequalities urgent. At a time when many African Americans questioned the efficiency of a black organisation that did not get formal approval from Booker T. Washington, the NAACP had to prove its worth as an alternative to the Tuskegee school. As such, it concentrated much of its early efforts on building a strong base in the United States. The next section of this chapter will thus focus on the history of the NAACP from its foundation in 1909, to the onset of the United States occupation of Haiti.

### **1.3 The “Negro Problem” in the United States and the Atlanta Compromise**

Despite the promulgation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in 1868 and in 1870, which, in theory, secured them similar rights to their white counterparts and prohibited their disenfranchisement, African Americans, in fact, experienced a very different reality. Following the withdraw of federal troops from the South in 1877, amid the codification of Jim Crow laws, which imposed on them a second-class status, genuine improvements for American blacks were almost inconceivable.<sup>65</sup>

The name “Jim Crow” takes its origin from the caricature dance executed by minstrel show entertainer Thomas D. Rice in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>66</sup> Performing in blackface, Rice mimicked the

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<sup>64</sup> The Reconstruction era is generally understood as this period immediately following the American Civil War in 1865 until the formal withdrew of federal troops from the South in 1877.

<sup>65</sup> Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 111.

<sup>66</sup> Camille F. Forbes, *Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), 22.

actions of an elderly and crooked black male slave. As the century progressed, the Jim Crow character grew in popularity and came to represent blacks in all their vulgarity in the white American imagination. By the end of the Reconstruction era, Jim Crow was associated with a set of laws, which legalised segregation between whites and blacks in the United States. Enacted in 1881, they created both *de jure* (in the South) and *de facto* (in the North) divisions between the two races.<sup>67</sup> These laws insured the separation of blacks and whites in various sectors, including in schools, public transportation, restaurants, restrooms, hotels, and so on. While in the 1890s, the U.S. Supreme Court had embraced the logic of “separate but equal” in regard to school boards,<sup>68</sup> the same logic was applied to almost all other segments of U.S. society; much to the detriment of African Americans, as no real equality existed under Jim Crow racism.

Jim Crowism became further entrenched in the U.S. South with the practice of lynching, which served to intimidate and to terrorise black neighbourhoods. In *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America* (2009), historian Amy Louise Wood contends that from 1890 to 1940, and especially during the turn-of-century, lynching emerged as a form of a ritualised public spectacle in the American South. Wood notes that “lynching assumed this tremendous symbolic power precisely because it was extraordinary and, by its very nature, public and visually sensational.”<sup>69</sup> Although some lynchings were executed privately, for the most part, they were done in full presence of the public that could view black (usually) men being hanged, often mutilated, and burned to ashes.<sup>70</sup> Lynching served various social functions, including reinforcing white Southern supremacy by simultaneously horrifying blacks with the news of an execution and

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<sup>67</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012), xi.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>69</sup> Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

by reassuring whites of their position of control. Though the crime was not exclusively reserved to black Americans (males), they represented the overwhelming majority of the cases. Wood estimates that some 3,200 black men were lynched between 1890 and 1940.<sup>71</sup>

Politicians North and South were well aware of the levels of violence these lynchings represented, yet no real measures were taken by the federal government to pass an anti-lynching bill. As the century closed, it became apparent that Washington was more preoccupied with safeguarding amicable relations with Southern states than protecting the lives of black citizens. In speaking about the *fin de siècle*, historian-activist Gilbert Jonas also suggests that “the Abolitionist sentiment of the North and Midwest had greatly dissipated and was replaced by growing humanitarian and political concerns for the massive influx of vulnerable European immigrants... for the most part, the disappearing gains of the freed Negro slaves were of lesser concern to the liberal and progressive forces outside the South.”<sup>72</sup> While some whites continued to condemn the treatment of black Americans, the acceptance of Jim Crow laws by most of the American public gives Jonas’ assertion foundation. The varying experiences with racism throughout the United States forced black Americans and those whites who were still interested, if not in the welfare of black Americans, in at least controlling their movement, to articulate new ways to speak about and to regulate the “Negro problem.”

On September 18, 1895, Booker T. Washington, one of the nation’s most important African American educators and public speakers gave a passionate speech that would fundamentally impact race relations in the United States. Speaking before a mixed audience at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta (Georgia), Washington argued what was to develop into

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>72</sup> Jonas, *Freedom’s Sword*, 10.



the central philosophical position of his Tuskegee school.<sup>73</sup> Although the State Department had thus far failed to guarantee the most basic rights to African Americans, Washington contended that black Americans should (at least on a temporary basis) relinquish their desire for political rights and instead, focus their efforts on becoming useful labourers.<sup>74</sup> By favouring vocational education, from Washington's assessment, black Americans could win the respect of America's white citizenry and eventually ask for political rights.<sup>75</sup> Most black and white critics accepted the speech. It came to be known as the "Atlanta Compromise." As the situation unfolded at the break of a new century, it was seen as the best alternative for a gradual improvement of black American life. It also guaranteed that any enhancement could be accomplished only at a pace that would be satisfactory to whites, especially in Southern states.

Washington's "accommodationist" viewpoint helped him gain much prestige. Until his death in 1915, he was central in all debates related to race issues. Similarly, his particular philosophy helped ensure white support for his educational and social endeavours. Historian Charles Flint Kellogg notes that "by preaching a doctrine of individualism, paternalism and antiunionism, he [Washington] was successful in getting...white philanthropists to contribute to the development of the Tuskegee Institute and the promotion of other black industrial schools."<sup>76</sup>

Despite early enthusiasm for Washington's principles, many prominent black leaders and intellectuals came to object to his views and their inherent limitations. Such was the case with William Edward Burghardt "W. E. B." Du Bois. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in February, 1868, Du Bois rose to become one of the most important black leaders during the pre-

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<sup>73</sup> Here Tuskegee school refers both to the physical facilities and Washington's philosophy.

<sup>74</sup> Robert L. Jack, *History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1943), 1

<sup>75</sup> Professor Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1909-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 67.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Civil Rights era. Although he had solicited Washington in 1894 for a teaching position at Tuskegee and a year later, even congratulated him for his speech in Atlanta,<sup>77</sup> Du Bois grew more and more disillusioned with the black educator. Scholar Mark Bauerlein has commented on Washington's and Du Bois' relationship between 1894 and 1904 as one founded on differences but mutual respect.<sup>78</sup> Such an understanding between the two was fragile and finally stretched to its limits in the early 1900s. Indeed, the irreparable break must have transpired with the publication of Du Bois' 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*. If a tension in the relationship was thereby formed, Du Bois surely encouraged its development by dedicating an entire chapter of his sociological monograph to criticising Washington's philosophy.

#### **1.4 Challenge to the accommodationist view: Rise and fall of the Niagara Movement**

Du Bois was in no respect the sole architect of the opposition to Washington. Even before the publication of his seminal work in 1903, many Northern blacks, especially in Boston, opposed the Tuskegee view. Aside from Du Bois' assault, public evidence that black Americans were now more assertively challenging Washington came in July 1903 during the National Negro Business League held in Boston. The agitator of anti-Washington feelings was William Monroe Trotter, a Harvard graduate, a former classmate of Du Bois and founder of the *Boston Guardian* established in 1901. According to the historian Gerald Horne, "Trotter and his hearty band erupted ...[and] rushed the podium to confront Washington physically" while the latter was giving a speech.<sup>79</sup> The actual details of the Trotter-Washington confrontation remain unclear as some historians maintain

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<sup>77</sup> Mark Bauerlein, "Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 46 (December 1, 2004): 107.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>79</sup> Gerald Horne, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2009), 43.

that other members of the party had gone on stage while Trotter shouted “Put me out arrest me!”<sup>80</sup> Whatever the case may be, police intervention was needed in order for the assembly to continue peacefully.<sup>81</sup> Trotter was sentenced to 30 days in prison for his role in what some historians have termed the “Boston Riot” of 1903.<sup>82</sup> More importantly, this incident vividly demonstrated that while Washington was still influential, he no longer spoke for all African Americans and there were some doubts regarding his ability for leadership.<sup>83</sup>

In July 1905, Du Bois began to organise his opposition to Booker T. Washington more seriously. Meeting next to the Niagara Falls in Ontario, Du Bois, Trotter, and other leading blacks who rejected Washington’s conciliatory views, organized the Niagara Movement. Notwithstanding its more radical stance, the group did not seem to have a well-crafted plan in 1905 and agreed to meet again soon.<sup>84</sup> By the following year, the Niagara Movement “distributed pamphlets, lobbied against segregation and discrimination, and for a brief period published a journal, the *Moon*.”<sup>85</sup> Though the group's efforts helped open a more public discussion on varying assessments of the race question in the United States, these exploits were short-lived. The Niagara Movement would ultimately suffer from internal divisions, lack of funds, and poor backing from white patrons. The advent of the Niagara Movement remains important insofar as it was one of the first radical organisations of its kind, but more significantly, because it stood by similar principals that were to be adopted by the NAACP years later.

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<sup>80</sup> Bauerlein, “Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois,” 113.

<sup>81</sup> Horne, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 43.

<sup>82</sup> William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 26.

<sup>83</sup> Bauerlein, “Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois,” 113.

<sup>84</sup> Jonas, *Freedom’s Sword*, 10.

<sup>85</sup> Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, 26.

### 1.5 A black and white effort: The birth of the NAACP

As mentioned earlier, while most Northern whites silently accepted the state of subordination conferred to black Americans, some began to recognise the inherent inconsistencies of the vision of a grand American civilisation based on equality before law and the situation of African Americans. In 1908, the Springfield, Illinois race riot provided a vivid example of the levels of violence race prejudice could lead to. Most worrying to some liberal white observers was the general apathy of Springfield's white residents.<sup>86</sup> Few residents, it seemed, disagreed with the mob violence, which had caused the death of at least eight African Americans and forced most of the city's small black population to flee.<sup>87</sup> In an influential article written for the *Independent* entitled "The Race War in the North," William English Walling, a Southerner from a former slave-owning family who had become a socialist and labour reformer, denounced the riot and conceded that unless real efforts were made by activists to challenge prevailing racist attitudes, most of the Southern reactionary feelings against blacks would spread in the North.<sup>88</sup>

Walling's outcry in the *Independent* was significant in the relaying of white Northern outrage over racism in the United States. If most whites, even those with more daring agendas in regard to race relations, had so far accepted Booker T. Washington's thinking, they began to wonder if it presented any real solution to the current social evils. In this respect, the more antagonistic view of individuals such as Du Bois and Trotter was analysed with greater interest. Whereas few shared the radicalism of the two black leaders (especially that of Trotter), it became

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<sup>86</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 10-11.

<sup>87</sup> According to Gilbert Jonas in *Freedom's Sword* (2004), two African American men were lynched, at least six were killed and many more were injured. Due to the poor reporting rate at the time, especially for crimes directed at black Americans, the violence might have resulted in many more aggressive crimes. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 10-11.

evident to many white liberals that the general public, even in the North, did not consider the race question to be one of the main concerns of social inequality, despite the state of American society. As such, without an association capable of challenging this atmosphere of indifference, Jim Crow-like racism could very likely propagate itself with relative ease in the North. Rallying the likes of whites such as Mary White Ovington, a social worker in New York, and Oswald Garrison Villard, the grandson of the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and soon-to-be editor of the New York *Evening Post* and later the *Nation*, a small group in New York began to organise for the creation of a more militant association which would fight for full African American integration into American society.

Early in 1909, both prominent white and African American individuals had heard Walling's protest. Meeting in his New York apartment to discuss the possibility of creating an organisation that would advocate on the behalf of black Americans' political, social and legal rights, the group began to plan for the establishment of a permanent body with branches throughout the nation. On February 12, 1909, such an organisation was born. By the time of its first annual meeting in late May 1909, it included as its core members Walling, Miss Ovington, and Oswald Garrison Villard, but also more influential white sponsors such as Moorfield Storey, an anti-imperialist lawyer from Boston.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, seeing the failures of his own undertaking with the Niagara Movement, Du Bois was eager to join the New York-based organisation with many of his followers. Thus, by 1910, as it was formally constituted as the National Association for the

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<sup>89</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 16.

Advancement of Colored People;<sup>90</sup> the organisation, in essence, represented paralleled efforts by similarly minded blacks and whites.<sup>91</sup>

As stated before, appreciably significant for its early development was also the NAACP's opposition to Booker T. Washington. Most NAACP members understood that any attempts at acquiring the faith of African Americans would come with militant campaigns targeted at legal battles and for constitutional reforms.<sup>92</sup> Such a position was incompatible with the particular view put forth by Booker T. Washington and his supporters. While Washington may have privately agreed with some of the measures and militancy of the NAACP, these opinions could not be made public without leaving the leader at odds with his white Southern patrons. Thus, despite its desire to minimise possible quarrels between Du Bois and Washington, for most of its early history, the NAACP existed in antagonism with one of the most important black leaders in the nation.<sup>93</sup>

Given the political and social environments of the time, the NAACP had to find convincing ways to establish itself as *the* most capable organisation in the defense of black civil liberties. Though it counted Du Bois and other influential black Americans as some of its early forefathers, others such as William Monroe Trotter soon played a less significant role, greatly due to a refusal to work under white supervision.<sup>94</sup> This reality underpinned one of the central problems of the NAACP, which was to show that it provided a realistic, effective and coherent alternative to a new vision of racial politics in the United States.

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<sup>90</sup> In 1909, the initial members of the NAACP were still struggling to find a name to their organisation. For instance, it originally adopted "National Committee on the Negro" for name.

<sup>91</sup> By the time of the NAACP second annual conference in May 1910, William English Walling served as the association's chairman of the executive committee, Mary White Ovington was its secretary, Oswald Garrison Villard its disbursing treasurer, Moorfield Storey its national president and Du Bois would be its director of publicity and research but also, the editor of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's official publication.

<sup>92</sup> August Meier and John H. Bracey Jr., "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: 'To Reach the Conscience of America,'" *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (February 1, 1993): 7.

<sup>93</sup> See chapter 7 of Kellogg's *NAACP* (1973) for a detailed discussion of this.

<sup>94</sup> Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, 27.

## 1.6 Fighting for the Advancement of Colored People: Some early endeavours

The NAACP found diverse ways of building a niche in the pre-World War One period. One such mode was the establishment of a monthly publication, which would serve to publicise its work and to win a broader audience.<sup>95</sup> To this effect, *The Crisis* was set up and headed by Du Bois. Du Bois, Villard, and others choose the name “*The Crisis*” as it invoked the idea that it was a “critical time in the history of the advancement of men” and race prejudice could no longer endure.<sup>96</sup> The NAACP and its monthly magazine thus fully incorporated progressive values about a need to reform the United States’ society to their mission statements.<sup>97</sup>

Through *The Crisis*, Du Bois found much liberty inside the association and despite the humble means on which the paper had to function, he was able to run a monthly publication committed to report news that was directly related to the affairs of the organisation, but also to counter the rampant racist discourses against blacks by commenting on the many cultural and social achievements of African Americans.

*The Crisis* was also vital in some of the NAACP’s initial efforts against lynching. It kept annual records of lynching<sup>98</sup> and also gave in-detail analyses of procedures (when they existed) to bring lynching mobs to trial. Despite the fact that the rationale behind a lynching was often the supposed compromise of a chaste Southern woman by a sex-crazed black male,<sup>99</sup> few, even at the time, were convinced by this explanation.<sup>100</sup> As expressed before, lynching not only took place as a communal activity; the immediate goal was often to permanently remove blacks who had

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<sup>95</sup> Jack, *History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, 9.

<sup>96</sup> “Editorial,” *The Crisis*, November 1910, 10.

<sup>97</sup> For an analysis of the place of the NAACP in the progressive movement of the early twentieth century, see Meier and Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965.”

<sup>98</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 208.

<sup>99</sup> Jack, *History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> In 1913, Ida Wells Barnett of the NAACP made an investigation on lynching and found that some ¼ of all black men lynched were brutally murdered for alleged rape or attempted rape. See *Ibid*, 27.

challenged the prevailing white supremacist order. Among the NAACP's chief strategies to bring action against lynching was agitating local communities to take action. For instance, in 1911, following a bloody lynching in Kentucky where white residents were able to buy a ticket to view and to shoot the deceased body of a black man who had just been lynched,<sup>101</sup> the NAACP tried to appeal to the United States government for legal support. While these efforts proved to be fruitless as the Taft administration argued that the federal government could not intervene in a matter that was in the immediate jurisdiction of individual states,<sup>102</sup> it did demonstrate the extent to which the NAACP's activism was founded on real tangible actions that went beyond passionate speeches. The NAACP was thus slowly positioning itself as an important actor in the civil society firmly dedicated to the defense of African Americans.

Another formative episode of the NAACP's early history was its campaign against the 1915 feature film *Birth of a Nation* directed by D. W. Griffith. Based on the 1905 novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* by Thomas Dixon Jr., the movie remains controversial among public and film critics to this day. Although, at the time, it made use of many technological advances for motion pictures and was decried by some critics as "history in motion"<sup>103</sup> for its supposedly historical account of the Reconstruction era, thanks to its crudely racist depiction of African Americans, the movie caused turmoil across the country. Almost every dehumanizing archetype of black manhood was present in the film: from showing blacks as self-sufficient corrupt politicians, to depicting them as sexual deviants ready to ravish white women at any instance. Given how rape was often used as a justification for lynching, the implications in the film could hardly elude the audience. The movie ultimately depicts the Ku Klux Klan as a vital

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<sup>101</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 210.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 149.



solution to the “Negro problem.” In fact, many historians have credited the film for the re-emergence of the Klan in some Southern (and Northern) states.<sup>104</sup>

Through its different branches now spread across the country, the NAACP took various measures against the feature film. One misguided attempt was to have cinemas completely ban the film.<sup>105</sup> As in the case with lynching, the association also attempted to appeal to public sentiment against the film via criticism published in *The Crisis*. The NAACP additionally wrote many petitions sent to influential individuals, in an attempt to stop the film’s distribution. Some branches in the North even tried to organize demonstrations in different theatres where the movie was being shown.<sup>106</sup> Desperate measures against the film also pushed some of the NAACP members to argue for the filming of a new motion picture that would correct the many mistakes and prejudices present in *Birth of a Nation*.<sup>107</sup> The project was aborted but shows how seriously the organisation took the matter at hand.

In the end, while some states did ban the movie from their theatres, it continued to gain popularity throughout the year and even President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat and a Southerner, as well as a scholar, watched the movie in a private session and was deeply moved by it.<sup>108</sup> In many ways, it is possible that, despite its best intentions, the NAACP’s efforts against the film may have helped it gain some popularity with individuals who, had it not been for the controversy it caused, may not have otherwise seen the picture.<sup>109</sup> Above all, while it fell short of its goals, the campaign against *Birth of a Nation* did serve to bring the NAACP much publicity.<sup>110</sup> Film historian

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 144.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>108</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius, “Woodrow Wilson and The Birth of a Nation: American Democracy and International Relations,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18, no. 4 (December 13, 2007): 703.

<sup>109</sup> Melvyn Stokes, *D.W. Griffith’s the Birth of a Nation: A History of the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Melvyn Stokes notes that the crusade helped the NAACP double in size. Stokes states that “at the beginning of 1915, it had a total membership of 5,000...by December, it had reached nearly 10,000.”<sup>111</sup> As an association that had struggled in its early years to enjoy real financial security and to affirm itself as a true national body capable of defending American blacks, the *Birth of a Nation* campaign served as an example of the association’s organising ability.

By 1915, while the NAACP gained significant visibility through such campaigns, to the South of Florida, the situation was quickly evolving in Haiti. The undercurrents in the Caribbean nation were rarely mentioned in the association’s monthly publication, but this reality was to change later that same year. The denunciation of the U.S. occupation of Haiti would be another way by which the NAACP would strengthen its position in the United States by upholding its effectiveness as the best defender of black rights domestically and worldwide.

## **Conclusion**

By the time of the United States occupation, Haiti had experienced many transformations in its political and social landscapes. At the dawn of the twentieth century, Haiti had known very little political stability and revolutions occurred one after another. Paradoxically, as Haiti’s situation greatly deteriorated, the United States, for its part, emerged as a regional hegemon. By means of various policies such as the expansion of the Monroe Doctrine through the Roosevelt Corollary and the Dollar Diplomacy, the United States was successful in its activities in Latin America. The occupation of Haiti was but yet another victory in the region following the Spanish-American war of 1898.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

When the news of the occupation reached the United States, most critics hesitated before making their condemnation public as Haiti's instability convinced many that U.S. operations were perhaps to the country's own benefit. When, in October 1915, the NAACP did make a public statement in *The Crisis* that opposed of the United States intervention in Haiti, the association itself had only existed for some six years. In this short interval separating the establishment of the NAACP and the United States' intervention in Haiti, the association attempted to justify its existence as *the* best alternative to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee philosophy and as a militant group best capable of bringing true social justice to African Americans. Among its many earlier activities were campaigns against lynching and efforts against the feature film *Birth of a Nation*.

This first chapter has thus sought to contextualise the social and political conditions within which the NAACP came in contact with the events in Haiti. As it shall be explored in subsequent chapters, although some influential black members of the NAACP may have felt a certain kinship with Haitians, as an association that was attentive to consolidate its position in the United States, its own individual motives cannot be divorced from its activism on the Haitian issue. Hence, each new campaign undertaken by the NAACP represented key opportunities to win visibility in the United States. As the next chapter will demonstrate primarily through the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois, the NAACP became more involved in the question of the Haitian occupation as it could be linked to the situation of black Americans in the United States and to the overall work of the association. Indeed, as the organisation would start to denounce the U.S. occupation of Haiti in the Caribbean more vehemently, it would also denounce the domestic policies of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson in the United States, perceiving a direct link between the two through the frame of racism.

## CHAPTER II

### **Woodrow Wilson, the NAACP and the occupation of Haiti, 1915-1919**

*"[...] It is not only our privilege as nation to recuse her [Haiti] from her worst self, but this would be in a sense a solemn act of reparation on our part for the great wrongs inflicted by this land on the Negro race." W. E. B. Du Bois to Woodrow Wilson, August 3, 1915.*

One fundamental aspect of the NAACP's early history that has not been discussed in any great detail thus far, and which was of vital importance to the association's campaign against the Haitian occupation, is its relationship with the Wilson administration. In 1912, there was much enthusiasm for Wilson's presidential candidacy and many, including Villard and Du Bois, believed that he would uphold the cause of black Americans. They were bitterly disappointed once he took office.

The occupation of Haiti, which occurred three years into Wilson's presidency, was not immediately condemned by the association; yet, it would provide an occasion for the NAACP to link domestic issues to Washington's policies overseas. Indeed, when commenting on the Haitian situation, the NAACP stressed Washington's inconsistency for combating the supposed anarchy in Haiti while turning a blind eye to the disfranchisement and the white mob violence affecting African Americans.

This chapter will therefore explore the particular ways in which the NAACP used the occupation of Haiti to criticise the Wilson administration for its dealings of racial politics. It will focus on the NAACP's first phase of activism in the Haitian issue by analysing the 1915 to 1919 period. It begins shortly before 1915 by providing an overview of the relationship between the NAACP and the Wilson administration to better understand the particular grievances the

association raised with the president. It then analyses key NAACP documents discussing the Haitian occupation inside a larger denunciation of the Wilson administration.

This chapter thus serves as an important prelude to the NAACP's more militant phase of denunciation following the end of the war. Dissatisfied with the Wilson administration and with the Democratic Party, the association would seek new opportunities with the Republican candidate Senator Warren Harding in the 1920 presidential election. By stressing the primacy of racial solidarity, scholars have generally neglected the centrality of domestic politics in the NAACP's treatment of the Haitian question. Hence, this chapter will provide a nuanced view of the association's initial involvement in the Haitian affair.

## **2.1 “Risk a Trial”: Wilson and the 1912 presidential election**

The fact that African Americans could have placed much hope in Woodrow Wilson, a native of Virginia, during the 1912 presidential election seems puzzling. Given that since the end of the Civil War, most black voters chose the Republican Party as it continued to symbolise emancipation, their support for a Democratic candidate was peculiar.<sup>112</sup> However, after three disappointing Republican presidencies (William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft), many African Americans saw the Democratic Party as a possible alternative.

Though the shadow of slavery still loomed over the Southern-dominated Democratic Party, it seemed to stand a chance with black voters in the 1912 presidential election. African Americans had thus far supported the Republicans faithfully, but the black press contended that under Theodore Roosevelt, the Party had stayed silent to their plight.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, it seems possible that

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<sup>112</sup> Kathleen L. Wolgemuth, “Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation,” *The Journal of Negro History* 44, no. 2 (April 1, 1959): 158.

<sup>113</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 156.

segregation at the State Department may have begun during the Roosevelt administration, taking the form of favouritism in employment and the separation of white and black clerks in some departments.<sup>114</sup>

Woodrow Wilson, for his part, was known as a scholar, as a former president of Princeton University (1902-1910) and as the governor of New Jersey (1911-1913). Incorporating progressive values to his presidential campaign, Wilson promised a world of “New Freedom” that aimed at bringing reforms to business and to banking institutions in an effort to end corruption.<sup>115</sup> As detailed in the previous chapter, this same logic would be behind Wilson’s interventionist tendencies in Latin America as his reformation attitude extended to the realm of foreign policy. For the United States, however, it reflected Wilson’s profound dislike for fraudulent dealings and his desire for a more “moral” form of capitalism. Thanks in part to his sponsorship by key individuals such as Villard, the NAACP’s treasurer, and Du Bois, its director of publicity and research, Wilson’s candidacy was able to win some credibility among black voters.<sup>116</sup>

More than Du Bois, Villard enjoyed somewhat of a personal relationship with the Democratic candidate. He first met Wilson in 1895 in a class where the latter was lecturing on American history.<sup>117</sup> Apart from his activities at the NAACP, Villard was also an important representative of the progressive press. As editor of the New York *Evening Post*, he supported Wilson in the race to become Governor of New Jersey in 1910.<sup>118</sup> Two years later, Wilson proclaimed that if he was elected president, he would guarantee a “fair dealing” with African

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<sup>114</sup> August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, “The Rise of Segregation in the Federal Bureaucracy, 1900-1930,” *Phylon* (1960-) 28, no. 2 (June 1, 1967): 180.

<sup>115</sup> Kennedy, *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, 106.

<sup>116</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 156.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

Americans.<sup>119</sup> Wilson asserted that “[Negroes] may count upon me for absolute fair dealing and for everything by which I could assist in advancing the interests of their race in the United States.”<sup>120</sup> Wilson, it would seem, was ready to be the “President of all people.”<sup>121</sup> However, as his presidential campaign evolved, he became particularly cautious about the promises he had made to black citizens. Villard, for his part, remained convinced of Wilson’s good faith.<sup>122</sup>

Enjoying a less intimate relationship with Wilson, Du Bois continued to be suspicious of the aspiring Southern leader. His pledge of becoming the president of all Americans notwithstanding, it was well-known that during his time as president of Princeton University, Wilson had closed the doors of the university to black students.<sup>123</sup> Equally significant was the fact that Wilson’s closest advisors and eventually important members of his administration were also Southerners known for their racial prejudices.<sup>124</sup> While all these factors contributed to cool some enthusiasm for Wilson, his presidency ultimately seemed like the lesser evil amongst the limited choices offered to black voters. Taft, who was also a candidate for this election, was especially despised for creating what many perceived as a “lily white” administration.<sup>125</sup> In the editorial section of the November 1912 *Crisis*, Du Bois wrote what amounted to a challenge to Wilson and his party:

“[...] in the face of promises disconcertingly vague, and in the face of the solid caste-ridden South, it is better to elect Woodrow Wilson President of the United States and prove once for all if the Democratic party dares to be Democratic when it comes to black men. It has proven that it can be in many Northern States and cities. Can it be in the nation? We hope so and we are willing to risk a trial.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Nancy J. Weiss, “The Negro and the New Freedom: Fighting Wilsonian Segregation,” *Political Science Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (March 1, 1969): 63.

<sup>120</sup> As quoted from Weiss, “The Negro and the New Freedom,” 63.

<sup>121</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 157.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-158.

<sup>123</sup> Kenneth O’Reilly, “The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 17 (October 1, 1997): 117.

<sup>124</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 158.

<sup>125</sup> “Editorial,” *The Crisis*, November 1912, 29.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

This comment demonstrates that Du Bois' sponsorship of Wilson's candidacy was only partial, insofar that he hoped the Democrat could prove to be deserving of black voters' trust. It was in full awareness of Wilson and the Democrats' poor reputation in race relations that Du Bois urged black voters to "risk a trial" with the Virginia native. After all, the magazine contended, Wilson was something of a "Christian gentleman and scholar"<sup>127</sup> and would work for the betterment of black Americans.

## **2.2 National Race Commission and Segregation in the State Department**

Wilson was elected president on November 5, 1912 and assumed office in March of the following year. One indication that he would overturn the promises he had made during his presidential campaign was the question of the establishment of a National Race Commission. In 1913, such an idea originated with R. H. Leavel, a Texan economist, and was later taken up by Villard.<sup>128</sup> With formal approval from the NAACP's Board of Directors, Villard hoped to undertake a study on racial questions in the United States.<sup>129</sup> Prior to presenting the project to the newly elected Wilson, Villard attempted to secure funds for the project.<sup>130</sup> African American history scholar Charles F. Kellogg stresses that by aiming for 50,000 dollars Villard hoped that Wilson would be able to bypass Congress (which would have looked unfavourably on the Commission) for financial support and hence, to increase the chances of seeing such a project come to fruition.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>128</sup> Weiss, "The Negro and the New Freedom," 72.

<sup>129</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 159.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.



In May 1913, Wilson finally heard of Villard's intentions. He initially displayed interest for the project,<sup>132</sup> but he later fell silent to Villard's proposal and subsequently made clear that he no longer supported it. Just as Villard was trying to convince Wilson of the importance of such a study, the latter's cabinet was more actively establishing segregation in the State Department.

Armed with the evidence of governmental discrimination against blacks, Villard directly confronted Wilson. In a series of letters exchanged during the summer of 1913, Wilson admitted to some segregation in the State Department, but he argued that it was done with the best interests of both races at heart.<sup>133</sup> In Wilson's estimations, segregation in certain federal posts would only serve to ease tensions between blacks and whites.<sup>134</sup> Wilson even argued that these new policies were carried out with the approval of many influential blacks (without ever stating who those were).<sup>135</sup> He further maintained that segregation was indeed *for* black Americans as opposed to being *against them*.<sup>136</sup>

Wilson supported segregation but was also aided in this respect by members of his cabinet such as William McAdoo (Secretary of Treasury), Josephus Daniels (Secretary of the Navy) and Albert Burleson (a Postmaster-General).<sup>137</sup> Burleson, who perhaps even more than the others believed segregation was pressing and absolutely necessary,<sup>138</sup> felt that the situation at the Railway Mail Service had become "intolerable" as blacks and whites were forced to dine together and unbearably, to share washrooms.<sup>139</sup> The Railway Mail Service was indeed among the first areas to be segregated according to these new reforms.

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<sup>132</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 161.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> O'Reilly, "The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson," 118.

<sup>137</sup> Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," 158.

<sup>138</sup> O'Reilly, "The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson," 118.

<sup>139</sup> Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," 159.

Regardless of his increasingly strained relations with the President in light of the changes in the government policies, Villard was not yet completely discouraged and continued to push for the National Race Commission as the summer came to a close.<sup>140</sup> Such a Commission, it became evident, would perhaps be the only way the Democrats could save face and prove their favourable dispositions towards blacks. This was not, however, the way in which Wilson had envisaged the future. On August 19, 1913, the president outright repudiated the establishment of a National Race Commission.<sup>141</sup>

The NAACP received substantial negative press, especially from black leaders such as William Monroe Trotter, for its early support of Wilson. Trotter contended that the association had urged for Wilson's election, and hence, helped deceive black voters.<sup>142</sup> In November of the following year, Trotter insisted on having a conference at the White House with the president to discuss the plight of African Americans.<sup>143</sup> The meeting turned into a heated discussion and ended when Trotter was ordered to leave, the President having been deeply offended by his tone.<sup>144</sup> This incident further legitimised claims about Southern-Democratic racism in the White House.

In the end, even if some minor changes were brought to the Democrats' segregationist policies,<sup>145</sup> the experience left bitter memories in the minds of African Americans, the NAACP, Villard and most notably, Du Bois. As a black American, Du Bois' decision to support Wilson's candidacy in the 1912 presidential election had been much more politically controversial than that of Villard, and he had exposed himself to reappraisal.

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<sup>140</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 164.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 165

<sup>142</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 167.

<sup>143</sup> O'Reilly, "The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson," 119.

<sup>144</sup> Weiss, "The Negro and the New Freedom," 71.

<sup>145</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 173.

By 1915, and especially following the debacle around the film *Birth of A Nation*, Wilson had been fully discredited as this “president of all people.” Until the end of his presidency, he largely avoided addressing questions that dealt specifically with race. Racism in the United States, as the president understood it, was a “human problem” and not a “political one.”<sup>146</sup>

Although the NAACP never ceased to find avenues to bring attention to the racial injustices under the Wilson administration, it found a new platform on which to place further political commentary with the beginning of the occupation of Haiti in July 1915.

With Haiti, the NAACP was able to bring attention to the hypocrisy of Wilson’s administration. Understanding the close relationship between domestic and foreign politics reveals a complex picture of the NAACP’s involvement in the first five years of the U.S. occupation of Haiti. The following section will explore Du Bois’ 1915 letter to President Wilson and his editorial pieces from *The Crisis*, all discussing the Haitian occupation.

### **2.3 Du Bois’ August 1915 letter to Wilson**

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1915, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote to President Wilson concerning the United States’ policy in Haiti. In his reading of Du Bois’ letter to the Democratic head of state, historian Léon D. Pamphile puts forward that Du Bois “protested Wilson’s policy” in Haiti,<sup>147</sup> suggesting that he rejected the U.S. position in the Caribbean island. Cultural historian Mary A. Renda agrees with Pamphile in saying that the letter was an expression of Du Bois’ grave concerns over Washington’s high-handed dealings in Haiti.<sup>148</sup> Likewise, Renda contends that in the first five years of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, Du Bois was among the sole spokespersons for Haitian

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<sup>146</sup> O’Reilly, “The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson,” 119.

<sup>147</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 144.

<sup>148</sup> Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 188-189.

sovereignty.<sup>149</sup> Yet, if Du Bois' letter did constitute a break from the dominant American attitude of the day, a closer study of the entire document reveals a much more nuanced approach to Washington's Haitian policy.

Taking upon himself the role of an advisor, Du Bois made a series of recommendations in his letter for the implementation of a Commission. He identified three main objectives for such a Commission: first, to reassure Haitians that the U.S. does not wish to question Haiti's sovereignty; second, to work in close collaboration with Haitians with the goal of ensuring stability and peace in the future; and third, to establish closer relations between the two countries.<sup>150</sup>

While Du Bois insisted that he was "deeply disturbed by the situation in Haiti"<sup>151</sup> and that the island constitutes "almost the sole modern representative of a great race of men among the nations,"<sup>152</sup> he also makes clear that he does not reject a U.S. intervention in Haiti. He elaborates on this point further by explaining that:

"It seems to me that the United States in this case, even more than in the case of Mexico, owes it to herself and humanity to make her position absolutely clear. Haiti is not all bad. She has contributed *something* to human uplift and if she has a chance she can do more [...] *It is not only our privilege as nation to rescue her from her worst self*, but this would be in a *sense a solemn act of reparation* on our part for the great wrongs inflicted by this land on the Negro race."<sup>153</sup> [Emphasis added]

This passage illustrates the many shortcomings of imagining black solidarity as a simple enterprise. While later in this same letter, Du Bois urged Wilson to reassure the "ten million American citizens of Negro descent"<sup>154</sup> in the United States that the U.S. has no designs that would go against the political independence of Haiti – therefore, expressing a sense of racial solidarity

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>150</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to Woodrow Wilson, August 3, 1915, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2. <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312>.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

between Haitians and African Americans – like other Americans, Du Bois also believed in the overall goals of a U.S. intervention in Haiti. Here, Du Bois argued much less for a repudiation of U.S. objectives in Haiti than for *a review* of the terms in which American strategies were to be carried out in the country. He maintained that Haiti had “contributed *something* to human uplift” and that with the *United States’ guidance*, it could “do more.” Such claims suggest a tacit acceptance of U.S. superiority and paternalism in Caribbean affairs, as it is the United States’ “privilege as nation” to “recuse” Haiti “from her worst self.” This stance on the Haitian situation seems to be at odds with the optimistic assessment of historians such as Pamphile. Similarly, contrary to Renda’s argument about paternalism, which seems to sit exclusively in the hands of white Marines and white officials in Haiti and Washington, Du Bois’ conviction of the United States’ superiority suggests an approval of United States paternalist standing vis-à-vis Haiti.

In this same letter, Du Bois warned Wilson of the dangers of a “high-minded” policy in Haiti as it would serve to lessen “the moral hegemony of the United States in the Western hemisphere.”<sup>155</sup> Such concerns show the complexity of Du Bois’ position regarding the Haitian occupation and the role of the U.S. in world politics. Du Bois’ speaking of the United States’ “moral hegemony” once more echoes an acceptance of American superiority.

This letter also illustrates Du Bois’ apprehension of how Washington’s policies overseas could affect its domestic standing in questions related to race. Indeed, Du Bois appeared convinced that a fairer program in Haiti would give the Wilson administration a more positive image among African Americans. Although it is doubtful that, in 1915, most black Americans cared much about the situation in Haiti, the country still represented *something* of a black revolutionary symbol,

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<sup>155</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to Woodrow Wilson, August 3, 1915, 2.

thanks to its 1791 slave uprising.<sup>156</sup> The State Department's "patience" in Haiti could prove to African Americans that, regardless of its standing on race problems domestically, the Wilson administration did not hold any prejudice against blacks. In this sense, reassuring the "ten million American citizens of Negro descent" meant less reassuring them that there would be no intervention in Haiti, and more that any involvement with Haiti would be fair and free of racial intolerance. Wilson's policy and lack of firm desire to help elevating the situation of black Americans greatly stained his reputation. Haiti could possibly serve as a means to help the president invalidate his negrophobic image in the United States.

This idea is reiterated again at the end of Du Bois' letter when he clearly expressed that:

"The United States throughout the world [has] a reputation for studied unfairness toward black folk. The political party whose nominee you are is historically the party of Negro slavery. Is this not a particular opportune occasion to attack [...] these assumptions [...]?"<sup>157</sup>

Du Bois and other African Americans who voted for the Democratic Party took a significant (albeit calculated) risk. With Wilson's refusal to support a National Race Commission and the segregation in the State Department, Democrats had deceived black Americans. If the party refused to change its policies domestically, the Haitian situation was arguably one of the unique opportunities it possessed to win back at least some credibility in its alleged sincerity to advance the cause of all Americans.

Du Bois' recommendations did not seem to have any effect on the President. A month later, Villard also proposed a similar Haitian Commission, this time to the Secretary of State Robert Lansing.<sup>158</sup> Villard advised that James Weldon Johnson, who by then had already become an

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<sup>156</sup> For more on African Americans' perceptions on Haitian Revolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Maurice Jackson, "'Friends of the Negro! Fly with Me, The Path Is Open to the Sea': Remembering the Haitian Revolution in the History, Music, and Culture of the African American People," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6, no. 1 (2008): 59–103.

<sup>157</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to Woodrow Wilson, August 3, 1915, 3.

<sup>158</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard to Robert Lansing, September 3, 1915. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

important African American public figure, directed it.<sup>159</sup> Villard received a very cool response from Lasing.<sup>160</sup> Much like Du Bois, Villard believed that a Commission on the Haitian situation could help Washington in its overall image.<sup>161</sup> Although Lasing mentioned that he would keep Wilson informed of Villard's suggestions, he showed little enthusiasm for answering questions about the state of affairs in Haiti.<sup>162</sup>

In light of Washington making clear that it would “refrain from making public any statement regarding its policy in Haiti,”<sup>163</sup> the association, and Du Bois especially, grew impatient in the face of so much silence and secrecy. As the year progressed, Du Bois' tone regarding the occupation became more critical. Through *The Crisis*, he would comment on the situation in Haiti.

## 2.4 Haiti in *The Crisis*

Du Bois' first real appraisal of the Haitian situation in *The Crisis* came in the October 1915 issue, nearly three months after the American landing. Pamphile argues that Du Bois utilised *The Crisis* “to rally African American's sentiment against” a U.S. intervention.<sup>164</sup> A closer look at *The Crisis*' editorials reveals that Du Bois might have also wanted to link the Haitian issue to concrete problems affecting African Americans that the NAACP had an interest in combating such as lynching.

While reporting the words of a Georgia paper which stated that Haitians had to be “controlled in the interest of America and civilization”, Du Bois added: “if the ‘civilization’ is to

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 285.

<sup>161</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard to Robert Lasing, September 3, 1915. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

<sup>162</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 285.

<sup>163</sup> Second Assistant Secretary of State to Nettie J. Asberry, Field Agent for the NAACP in Tacoma, October 15, 1915, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>164</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 104.

be of the Georgia type may the good Lord deliver Haiti from it!’’<sup>165</sup> This small remark is significant. Only two months prior to this piece, Leo Frank, a Jewish-American pencil factory owner, was brutally lynched in Marietta, Georgia, for the alleged murder of Mary Phagan, a white teenager under his employment.<sup>166</sup> Much as Frank was not black, the fact that lynching was employed for his alleged murder made his death significant for the NAACP. The association was greatly dissatisfied with the Wilson administration’s stance on lynching; a problem that disproportionately affected African Americans. Although Wilson had made no definite promises to black Americans, much less one directly related to lynching, they had still hoped that the president would react with the support of an anti-lynching bill.

Du Bois’ remark in this editorial may also originate from the fact that he understood white Americans’ greater ability to feel empathy for whites. Certainly, the double lynching of two black men in Starkville, Mississippi, which occurred during the same time as that of Frank, generated few cries of indignation.<sup>167</sup> Du Bois was aware of this reality and hoped white Americans would be forced to confront their own bigotry.

By the end of 1915, some 56 African Americans were lynched in the United States.<sup>168</sup> Utilising the classic excuse of state rights versus federal rights, the State Department avoided addressing the issue. In affirming that Georgia possessed no type of civilisation that Haiti could possibly feel envious of, Du Bois was clearly pointing out the hypocrisy of an intervention in Haiti. If Washington could not reason with Georgia and bring justice within the United States, how could it achieve such a goal overseas? Furthermore, if mob violence in Georgia and the American South

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<sup>165</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Hayti,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 281.

<sup>166</sup> Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 148.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>168</sup> Douglas O. Linder, “Lynchings: By Year and Race,” Famous American Trials, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html>.



could cause such chaos and generated no concrete measures to prevent it, what right did the U.S. possess to speak about civilisation and humanity in Haiti?

As well chosen as these words were, they were not Du Bois' only comments on the occupation of Haiti. In the editorial section of the same issue, Du Bois elaborated on many of his early observations. He wrote:

“The United States has violated the independence of a sister state. With absolutely no adequate excuse she has made a white American Admiral sole and irresponsible dictator of Haiti [...] The lynching and murder in Port-au-Prince is no worse than, if as bad as, the lynching in Georgia. Haiti can, and will, work out her destiny and is more civilized today than Texas.”<sup>169</sup>

Du Bois positions Haiti as a “sister state” because he sees this as a useful instrument to speak about the social tribulations in the United States. Indeed, it is likely that when discussing Texas in this passage, Du Bois was making reference to the case of Will Stanley, lynched in Temple, Texas, in July 1915.<sup>170</sup> According to *The Crisis*, he was killed in a festive event that brought together some 10,000 Southerners.<sup>171</sup> As explained by the historian Molly M. Baroco, these comparisons between Haiti and the U.S. South served to “undermine the American justification for the occupation by revealing the hypocrisy of the U.S. government in claiming that Haiti was too violent and uncivilized to govern itself while harbouring the perpetrators of commensurate violence within its own sovereign borders.”<sup>172</sup> Given how most American newspapers painted Haiti,<sup>173</sup> what Du Bois would judge it “more civilized today than Texas” could only be interpreted as a serious affront to the United States' self-perception.

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<sup>169</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Hayti,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 291.

<sup>170</sup> Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 93.

<sup>171</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Frank,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 277.

<sup>172</sup> Molly Baroco, “Imagining Haiti: Representations of Haiti in the American Press during the U.S. Occupation, 1915-1934” (Master's Thesis, Georgia State University, 2011), 68.

<sup>173</sup> See Blassingame, “The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920.”

In the November 1915 issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois restated most of his earlier assessments about the Haitian occupation. In the editorial section called “Haitians and other Savages,”<sup>174</sup> Du Bois insisted that:

“Governor Slaton of Georgia was nearly killed because he had commuted to life imprisonment the death sentence of a man as to whose guilt of murder the governor claimed to have grave doubt, although this man had been convicted by the highest court in this great land. President Guillaume, of Haiti, was killed because he had ordered the execution without trial of more than one hundred men whose only crime was their alleged opposition to his governmental policies [...] As between the mob in Georgia and the mob in Haiti, the balance of provocation is certainly in favour of the slayers of Guillaume, especially since the attackers of Governor Slaton are not charged with degrading stimulus of the Vaudoux and Obeah”<sup>175</sup>

This passage is noteworthy in many respects. First, the mention of “Governor Slaton of Georgia” is yet another reference to the Leo Frank case. As indicated by this quote, John M. Slaton, who was Governor of Georgia at the time of the Leo Frank affair, had decided to change Frank’s death sentence for the alleged murder of Mary Phagan to one of life imprisonment due to the lack of evidence against Frank. The news had not pleased the mobs of Georgia, who had long desired to avenge the death of an innocent white female victim. They started to show strong resentment towards their Governor. This editorial found much comparison to be made between the situation in Georgia and that of Haiti. It would seem that the “balance” favoured Haiti as Guillaume Sam had unjustly given orders for the execution of 167 political prisoners “whose only crime was their alleged opposition to his governmental policies.” Once more, such analogy played with the ideas expressed earlier about Haiti being more “civilised” than the U.S. South. Not only was the South “uncivilised,” Washington did nothing to bring a “civilisation mission” to its own territory.

The same editorial made further analogies between the conditions in the United States and those in Haiti when declaring:

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<sup>174</sup> Despite this derogatory title, it is difficult to image what inspired Du Bois to give this name to his editorial. While it may be that he was abiding to the American discourse of Haitian otherness, not much in the actual piece suggest that he was in fact doing that. Nevertheless, the title is still worth noting.

<sup>175</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Haitian and Other Savages,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 30.

“Can the Haitians accept with equanimity the prospect of paying the salary of some ‘deserving democrat’ who may have come from the Texas town where all the inhabitants turned out last month to make a holiday spectacle of the burning alive of a black man merely accused of murder?”<sup>176</sup>

Here Democrats are directly targeted by the assertions made in the magazine. It seems unclear whether at this time, the American public knew of the exact demographic compositions of the Marines sent to Haiti. In his study, Hans Schmidt contends that the idea that all U.S. Marines were from the South is misleading.<sup>177</sup> Many high-ranking officials were, in fact, from the North.<sup>178</sup> At the time, given that many members of the U.S. Navy were in fact from the South, it seems plausible that Du Bois was writing under the same contention. In any case, the Democrats are vilified in this editorial. They were exposed as hypocrites who cried savagery in Haiti, yet brushed over violent crimes in the U.S. South.

In the December 1915 issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois again used much of the same logic he had employed in the previous articles to speak about the occupation. In an editorial simply titled “Haiti,” Du Bois accused the White House of deliberately remaining silent about the particulars of its intervention in Haiti.<sup>179</sup>

This time, Du Bois took particular offence to the fact that the function of the U.S. Minister to Haiti, which traditionally was given to African Americans, since Wilson’s administration had been handed to a Southern white.<sup>180</sup> In this specific instance, Du Bois wondered if the new U.S. Minister to Haiti, a certain “Mister Blanchard,” was related to the same Blanchard that signed a racist advertisement in the January 8, 1908 *Times* of Shreveport, Louisiana.<sup>181</sup> The announcement in question discouraged African Americans from engaging in debates about prohibition in the

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<sup>176</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Haitian and Other Savages,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 32.

<sup>177</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 145.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Haiti,” *The Crisis*, December 1915, 80.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 81

Parish of Caddo as they were deemed too simple-minded for such complicated questions.<sup>182</sup> Du Bois finished the editorial by adding: “it will be remembered that the parish of Caddo has lynched more Negroes than any single county in the United States.”<sup>183</sup> Historian Brenda Gayle Plummer points out that the minister to Haiti was named Arthur Bailly Blanchard,<sup>184</sup> whereas in the advertisement, the individual is called Ashton Blanchard.<sup>185</sup> Whether the two individuals were related or not, the effect for *Crisis*’ readers would have been the same. In either case, Blanchard was a (seemingly racist) white Southerner put in place by Woodrow Wilson’s manoeuvring. In a similar technique, mentioning Caddo’s infamous place in America’s lynching history once more furnished attention to this issue and the lack of response from the State Department.

In early 1916, the NAACP formed the Committee on Anti-Lynching Programme to combat lynching more effectively in the United States.<sup>186</sup> The same year, Jesse Washington was lynched in Waco, Texas. In what the NAACP and others termed the “Waco Horror,”<sup>187</sup> the victim was hanged and then burnt before a crowd of some 10,000 spectators.<sup>188</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, a native New Yorker employed by the NAACP to investigate the case, reported that some individuals went as far as to purchase parts of Jesse Washington’s body and carried them as souvenirs.<sup>189</sup>

In such a climate, as Wilson was seeking re-election for a second term in 1916, the association was much more careful in its choice of endorsement. In the November issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois printed an “Address to Colored Voters” from the Republican National Committee in New York.<sup>190</sup> The address made clear that:

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Plummer, “The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” 128.

<sup>185</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Haiti,” *The Crisis*, December 1915, 81.

<sup>186</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 217.

<sup>187</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Contents for July 1916,” *The Crisis*, July 1916, 107.

<sup>188</sup> Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 179.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>190</sup> Colored Advisory Committee, “Address to the Colored Voters,” *The Crisis*, November 1916, 4.

“The Administration was ‘too proud to fight’ Mexico but did not hesitate to conquer the Black Republic of Haiti and Santo Domingo. There was one policy of International justice for Mexico and another one for the Negro Republics to the south of us. The President has expressed himself as in sympathy with the ‘enslaved men and women of Mexico,’ but has found no words of sympathy for the Colored citizens of America. ‘The New Freedom’ does not include the Negro. ‘Humanity’ for which the President has expressed such great love, does not include the Colored Race.”

Although not written by Du Bois himself, the address showcased similar feelings evoked by the director of research in his own editorial pieces about Haiti. Just as Wilson’s cabinet held two separate sets of policies for Mexico and for Haiti, the United States, under Woodrow Wilson, had two series of laws for black and white citizens.<sup>191</sup>

This passage would seem to validate the assertion of Brenda Gayle Plummer, who stresses that “black Americans exhibited a persistent interest in their government’s activities in Haiti. They placed Haitian needs on their own political agendas.”<sup>192</sup> “Persistent” might be too strong a word and would insinuate that the NAACP’s coverage of the Haitian occupation was steady for the duration of the U.S. intervention. If the NAACP quickly questioned the State Department’s motives for occupying Haiti in late 1915 and used it to make commentary on domestic social evils, by the following year, Haiti had almost completely disappeared from the pages of *The Crisis*.

## **2.5 Back to Domestic Politics: the NAACP and the First World War**

Various factors may help to explain the NAACP’s relative lack of coverage of the Haitian occupation after 1916 and especially after 1917. It seems likely that it can be interpreted as a return to more persistent domestic considerations.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, the issue of a possible U.S. entry to the war had become a central apprehension in the country. For the NAACP and particularly for Du Bois,

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<sup>191</sup> It should be noted that Mexico was undergoing a revolution between 1910 and 1920.

<sup>192</sup> Plummer, “The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” 126.

<sup>193</sup> For example, in July 1917, the NAACP did respond to the East St. Louis riot. The next month, it also responded to the Houston Camp Logan riot. See Kellogg, *NAACP*, 224-227 and also 260-262 respectively for more on the NAACP’s involvement in each case.

the question of World War I and the place of African American soldiers in it were important. Although the NAACP's Board of Directors had initially adopted a position of neutrality, even after the U.S. Congress declared war on the German Empire in April 1917,<sup>194</sup> the association's position changed considerably before the end of the conflict as it supported a greater integration of African Americans into army units.<sup>195</sup> Despite the fact that many African Americans had initially interpreted the conflict in Europe as one which had no direct effect on them<sup>196</sup> (and that there were even questions raised about their loyalty),<sup>197</sup> ultimately, the war was redefined as a unique opportunity for African Americans to show that they were not second-class U.S. citizens and that they believed in the democratic principles for which the United States stood for. Likewise, there was a hope that black Americans' situations would significantly improve in the post-war world.<sup>198</sup>

The African American press played a great role in changing black assessment of the war. Du Bois, for his part, also went from being doubtful about the conflict,<sup>199</sup> to becoming an endorser of the black American war effort, even to the point of accepting segregated training camps.<sup>200</sup> His most daring statement about the war came in the July 1918 issue of *The Crisis* where he declared that:

“Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills.”<sup>201</sup>

This declaration by Du Bois shocked more than a few and echoed much of the conciliatory attitude associated with the late Booker T. Washington. It is possible that much like his

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<sup>194</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 249.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>196</sup> Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, 36.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-67.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>199</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 254.

<sup>200</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 133.

<sup>201</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Editorial,” *The Crisis*, July 1918, 111.

contemporaries, Du Bois was blinded by the idealism that the war would bring about dramatic progress to the situation of African Americans.<sup>202</sup> However, as many historians pointed out, Du Bois' change of heart and his insistence that African Americans "close ranks" with white Americans and fight the war in Europe was most likely inspired by opportunistic calculations, as he was seeking a position (that never materialised) at the Military Intelligence Branch (MIB) as captain.<sup>203</sup> Many black critics attacked him for what they saw as simple manoeuvring and lack of integrity.<sup>204</sup> It was widely believed that Joel E. Spingarn, chairman of the NAACP's Board of Directors from 1914 to 1919 and a close friend of Du Bois, might have suggested a position for Du Bois at the MIB. At the time, Spingarn was already serving there as an intelligence officer.<sup>205</sup> Du Bois defended himself against those charges and argued that he had made his "Close Ranks" editorial only *after* he had heard of a captaincy at the MIB,<sup>206</sup> but most historians today remain unconvinced.

Du Bois' own biographer, David Levering Lewis, argues that "evidence points to the fact that Du Bois struck a deal, through Spingarn, with the War Department to use the enormous influence of his magazine towards rallying African Americans behind the war in return for the heady opportunities he and Spingarn persuaded themselves their military commissions would yield."<sup>207</sup> In any case, while Du Bois found some black supporters in the likes of newspapers such

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<sup>202</sup> Jennifer D. Keene, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Wounded World: Seeking Meaning in the First World War for African-Americans," *Peace & Change* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 140.

<sup>203</sup> For more details on the motivation behind Du Bois' editorial see, Mark Ellis, "'Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors': W. E. B. Du Bois in World War I," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1, 1992): 96–124; and William Jordan, "'The Damnable Dilemma': African-American Accommodation and Protest during World War I," *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (March 1, 1995): 1562–83.

<sup>204</sup> Ellis, "'Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors,'" 110.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>206</sup> Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma," 1562.

<sup>207</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race: 1868-1919*, (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1993), 555.

as the *Washington Bee* and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*,<sup>208</sup> most of the black press voiced heavy criticism of his conduct in the affair. In light of these developments in the United States, the case of the Haitian occupation easily fell into a lesser priority for the association.

The lack of mention of the Haitian occupation becomes even more surprising when Du Bois entered into an international project with the Pan-African Congress of 1919 amid the Paris Peace Talks. Regrouping influential blacks from around the globe, the Conference occurred at the height of enthusiasm for a post-war new world order. Du Bois was greatly responsible for the organisation of the event.<sup>209</sup> Overall, Haiti was of little importance in this particular campaign. The “Memorandum” for the February meetings does mention adopting policies acknowledging “the full recognition of the independent Governments of Abyssinia [Ethiopia], Liberia and Haiti,”<sup>210</sup> but it appears Du Bois’ true interest in the event was the fate of African colonies and personal exposure. Despite other occasional allusions to her revolution, Haiti was a largely secondary actor of the 1919 Congress. Nonetheless, a year later, the country would once more reappear at the forefront of one of the NAACP’s latest campaigns.

## Conclusion

Although historians studying the NAACP’s engagement in denouncing the U.S. occupation of Haiti have usually begun their analysis in 1920 with the publication of James Weldon Johnson’s articles in *The Nation* and in *The Crisis*, investigating the first five years of the U.S. intervention

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<sup>208</sup> Jordan, “The Damnable Dilemma,” 1572.

<sup>209</sup> Clarence G. Contee, “Du Bois, the NAACP, and the Pan-African Congress of 1919,” *The Journal of Negro History* 57, no. 1 (January 1972): 13.

<sup>210</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Memorandum to M. Diagne and Others on the Pan-African Congress” *The Crisis*, March 1919, 224.



is necessary to appreciate the 1920-1922 period as it sets the tone for later actions undertaken by the association regarding the Haitian affair.

With Haiti, the NAACP found a fruitful terrain to voice its criticism of Wilson's administration. Villard and Du Bois had placed great hope in his candidacy during the 1912 presidential election and had been disappointed by his lack of desire to elevate the situation of black Americans. Wilson had not only refused a National Race Commission in 1913, but some of his closest collaborators, with his blessing, helped segregate the State Department.

While Washington justified its intervention in Haiti as one that rested on principals of humanitarian interventionism, there was little humanity in the U.S. South, as the late 1910s had become a period of grotesque public spectacles of lynching. Du Bois, especially, was astute in pointing out this paradox. Using his voice in a letter addressed to the president in August 1915, Du Bois tried to convince Wilson that Haiti could become a useful instrument for the president to prove that he held no racial prejudice against blacks. Seeing that the Wilson administration cared little about his input, Du Bois began to talk more severely about the occupation in *The Crisis*.

Historians have long maintained that Du Bois delegitimised the occupation on the basis of black solidarity; they have, however, paid less attention to the way Du Bois utilised the occupation of Haiti to discuss the racism of the Wilson era (hence, linking U.S. foreign policy in Haiti to domestic affairs). Without paying this period much courtesy, scholars have failed to comment on what might have been some of the principal motivations for James Weldon Johnson's trip to Haiti in 1920. As chapter three will address, not only did the occupation of Haiti give the NAACP an opportunity to deploy its savoir-faire as an organisation capable of starting a transnational campaign protesting U.S. activities overseas, the utilisation of the Haitian occupation also proved to be an important bargaining tool in forging an alliance with Republican Senator and future

President, Warren Harding. Consequently, continued protestations against U.S. imperialism in Haiti proved to be useful for the association's own domestic endeavours.

## CHAPTER III

### The NAACP, the occupation of Haiti, and Warren Harding, 1920–1922

*“To my mind this Haitian matter offers an attack on one of the weakest spots in the Wilson administration and I sincerely hope that you will push the attack to the limit.”*  
*James Weldon Johnson to Republican presidential candidate Warren Harding, October 14, 1920.*

In August 1920, James Weldon Johnson launched a full-scale attack on the Wilson administration, condemning its policies in Haiti with a series of articles published in *The Nation* and in *The Crisis*. The American public, which up to this point had cared little about the situation in Haiti, now took interest in claims about violence perpetrated by U.S. occupation forces in the Caribbean island. Historians have sustained that Johnson’s work on behalf of the NAACP was responsible for this change in opinion.<sup>211</sup> They have also suggested that Johnson’s voyage to Haiti and his investigative articles were inspired by feelings of black internationalism in vogue at the time.<sup>212</sup> Johnson’s activities were indeed international and rested in part on sentiments of racial solidarity between African Americans and Haitians. Although the NAACP’s interest in Haiti generally decreased after 1922, many African American artists credited Johnson’s articles from 1920 for inspiring them to explore Haiti’s revolutionary history in their work.<sup>213</sup>

While these accomplishments cannot be overstated, it is important not to lose sight of the domestic and political context in which they occurred. After two consecutive terms under the Wilson administration, the continued devaluation of black life, and a new presidential election in 1920, the Haitian occupation came to have a different meaning in the post-World War I context.

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<sup>211</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 115.

<sup>212</sup> See Felix Jean-Louis, “Harlemites, Haitians and the Black International: 1915-1934” (Florida International University, 2014), 28; Leon D. Pamphile, “The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti,” 92.

<sup>213</sup> Lindsay Jean Twa, “Troubling Island: The Imagining and Imaging of Haiti by African-American Artists, 1915--1940” (Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 20.

This chapter examines the period between 1920 and 1922 and calls for a reassessment of the NAACP's initiatives during this time. A closer look at the domestic context in which the Haitian campaign occurred reveals that black internationalism provides only a partial explanation of the NAACP's denunciations of the U.S. occupation at that time. Without excluding the premise of black solidarity, this chapter emphasises how the NAACP set up a multi-layered transnational campaign to critique the occupation of Haiti in a manner that not only helped it build a relationship with Republican Senator Warren Harding before he assumed office as President in 1921, but also helped the association to gain prestige on the domestic front.

### **3.1 The New Negro: African Americans and the Aftermath of WWI**

As seen in the previous chapter, W.E.B. Du Bois was the NAACP's central black figure to speak on behalf of Haiti's sovereignty from the start of the occupation until 1919. Nonetheless, coverage of the events in Haiti appeared unevenly during this period and were ultimately absent once the United States entered more fully into the war. Changes in U.S. society after the First World War may help explain why the NAACP re-evaluated the Haitian situation starting in 1920.

For African Americans, who had long questioned whether they should concern themselves with the conflicts of a nation that refused to accept their basic civil rights,<sup>214</sup> the end of the war was significant. Some 370,000 African American soldiers had served in the American Expeditionary Force in France (both in service and in combat).<sup>215</sup> Black soldiers expected a reception upon their return from Europe that they hoped would lead to tangible changes in domestic policy. However, they soon realised that racial equality was not on the nation's agenda.

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<sup>214</sup> Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, 65.

<sup>215</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 3.

By mid-1919, a series of violent race riots broke out in several U.S. cities. With the return of U.S. soldiers, increased competition for jobs in urban areas (especially between blacks and whites), migration of Southern African Americans and West Indians to Northern cities, and a general lack of leadership at both local and federal levels to deal with these new social issues, tensions escalated into violent confrontations.

Despite indications that U.S. society was as racist as it had been before, at the dawn of 1920, black Americans were far less conciliatory towards whites than they had been previously. After extensive travels across the U.S. in the summer of 1919,<sup>216</sup> Johnson observed that, unlike African Americans of previous generations, the “New Negro” of the post-war period was more assertive. Most African Americans now rejected the “politics of respectability,”<sup>217</sup> which, in the words of scholar Jonathan S. Coit, had been concerned with a desire “to undermine white supremacy by adherence to Victorian norms of restraint, self-denial, and sober morality.”<sup>218</sup>

Brenda Gayle Plummer argues that it was in the context of this rejection of the politics of respectability that African Americans and the NAACP began to reevaluate the U.S. occupation of Haiti.<sup>219</sup> As discussed before, this re-examination occurred precisely at a time when new global sensibilities towards blackness were also evolving. During the interwar period, black individuals from across the globe came into a greater dialogue with each other. In the United States, especially, the New Negro Movement (or Harlem Renaissance) came to flourish.

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<sup>216</sup> Eugene D. Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 202.

<sup>217</sup> Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham was the first to coin the term “politics of respectability” in speaking about black women’s participation in the Baptist Church in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002). Higginbotham defines politics of respectability as a method employed by African Americans to counter the dominant racist discourse surrounding blackness. Politics of respectability meant that black Americans monitored their own actions to appear respectable according to white Americans’ middle-class sensibilities.

<sup>218</sup> Jonathan S. Coit, “‘Our Changed Attitude’: Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 226.

<sup>219</sup> Plummer, “The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” 131.

Named after African American writer Alain Locke's 1925 anthology,<sup>220</sup> the "New Negro Movement" represented a crucial moment when African Americans were able to articulate their unique experiences as black individuals and U.S. citizens, but also as subjects of transnational black internationalism. A true international movement was born among members of the black diaspora during the 1920s. Whether African American, African, or West Indian, individuals who were racialised as black came to recognise that their destinies were interconnected through their experiences of racism. Creating international networks through migration, conferences, and literary criticism, they discussed their shared experiences of discrimination, alienation, and identity.<sup>221</sup> Despite differences in nationality, class, and political leaning, the experience of being black in a world that was hostile towards blackness strengthened pan-Africanist relations within the black diaspora.

It is within a framework that recognises black solidarity as a justification for action that most historians have interpreted the NAACP's activism between 1920 and 1922.<sup>222</sup> As this chapter will show, however, domestic concerns were very much a part of the NAACP's vision when speaking of Haiti.

### **3.2 The Renaissance Man: James Weldon Johnson as Executive Secretary**

In 1918, alarmed by rumours of Marine misconduct in Haiti,<sup>223</sup> the NAACP's Board of Directors voted to send James Weldon Johnson, the association's field secretary, and Herbert Seligman, a freelance writer and publicity director, to the Caribbean island.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 16.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>222</sup> See Jean-Louis, "Harlemites, Haitians and the Black International," 24; Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 104; Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934," 131.

<sup>223</sup> Twa, "Troubling Island," 56.

<sup>224</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 2001, 81.

As discussed in the previous chapter, both Villard and Du Bois had proposed a Commission to study the Haitian occupation in 1915. While Du Bois addressed president Wilson directly, Villard wrote to then-Secretary of State Robert Lasing and proposed Johnson as a trustworthy black for a mission to the Caribbean island.<sup>225</sup> Nothing came of it at first; the State Department was focussed on the war in Europe. In 1920, however, Villard and the NAACP's Board of Directors reiterated their choice of Johnson (over Du Bois), as they felt that his impressive experience in the diplomatic world in Latin America, in addition to his knowledge of Spanish and French, made him an ideal choice for an investigation in Haiti.<sup>226</sup>

In 1916, when Johnson first joined the NAACP as field secretary, it was agreed that the association had recruited a promising African American leader. Before becoming the NAACP's first black executive secretary in 1920, Johnson had already had an impressive career as a writer, lawyer, school principal, and U.S. consul in Theodore Roosevelt's administration.<sup>227</sup> Because of his vast experience, both in the literary and political worlds, and his importance in the New Negro Movement during the 1920s and 1930s, many later critics dubbed him the "Renaissance Man."<sup>228</sup>

Born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida, much like Du Bois and other black members of the NAACP, Johnson was from a middle-class black family.<sup>229</sup> After graduating from Atlanta University in 1894, he worked as an editor for the Jacksonville *Daily American* before becoming the first African American to be admitted to the Florida Bar Exam.<sup>230</sup> In 1901, he moved to New York where he worked with his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, as a lyricist.<sup>231</sup> It was not until

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<sup>225</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard to Robert Lasing, September 3, 1915. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

<sup>226</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 286.

<sup>227</sup> Gibbs, "James Weldon Johnson," 334.

<sup>228</sup> Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The African-American Century: How Black Americans Have Shaped Our Country* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 60.

<sup>229</sup> Gibbs, "James Weldon Johnson," 334.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

1906 that he began his diplomatic career.<sup>232</sup> As consul in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela from 1906 to 1908, and then in Nicaragua from 1909 to 1913, Johnson had the opportunity to observe U.S. activities in Latin America.

His unique position did not create animosity between himself and the State Department until Wilson's election. Historian William E. Gibbs has suggested that Johnson "placed his personal ambitions above opposition to imperialism."<sup>233</sup> Johnson's stance changed when the Wilson administration began to entrench segregation in the State Department. Johnson had once harboured hopes of becoming a U.S. cabinet minister and when it became apparent that this would not occur, he retired on September 1, 1913.<sup>234</sup> His early withdrawal from diplomatic functions created an almost personal resentment towards Wilson.<sup>235</sup> With no prospects of advancing with the Democratic Party in power, Johnson took a job as an editor for the *New York Age* under Booker T. Washington's leadership.<sup>236</sup>

Writing for the *Age*, Johnson did not initially oppose the U.S. occupation. In 1915, he contended that the U.S. had strategic interests in occupying Haiti and that lawlessness in the country made such an intervention inevitable.<sup>237</sup> While he disliked Wilson, Johnson felt that, in light of Haiti's instability, African American critics should refrain from condemning the occupation, an approach which contrasts with Du Bois, who in 1915 at least objected to the manner in which the occupation was carried out.<sup>238</sup> Johnson's biographer, Eugene D. Levy, claims that Johnson's "breaking point" came in 1918 when "the United States forced a new constitution

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>235</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 81.

<sup>236</sup> Gibbs, "James Weldon Johnson," 335.

<sup>237</sup> Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, 202.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.



through the Haitian legislature.”<sup>239</sup> Renda argues that post-World War I racial and international politics helped alter Johnson’s perspective on the Haitian situation.<sup>240</sup>

### 3.3 En Route to Haiti: Crafting the Investigation

It remains unclear how the NAACP, which was under financial distress, sponsored Johnson’s journey to Haiti. Considering some of its implications, it is worth looking closer at the financing of the Haitian trip. Levy suggests that the expenses were most likely taken up by the Republican Party.<sup>241</sup> As 1920 was a presidential election year, it is likely that the Republicans, interested in finding ways of publicly attacking the Democrats on their foreign policy agenda, approved of and funded a trip to Haiti.<sup>242</sup> This seems plausible in light of the fact that, even before assuming his position as executive secretary, Johnson was in contact with members of the Republican Party and had discussed the possibility of a Haitian mission as early as 1918.<sup>243</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, in particular, whom Johnson had consulted that same year, was enthusiastic about the prospect of a Haitian investigation.<sup>244</sup>

Unlike Du Bois, who was careful not to make too close political alliances with either the Republican or Democratic Parties, Johnson was a committed Republican. In 1904, he joined the New York-based Colored Republican Club, regrouping black supporters of Theodore Roosevelt during the presidential election of that year.<sup>245</sup> Using his talents as a lyricist and position as an

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>240</sup> Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 190.

<sup>241</sup> Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, 203–204.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>244</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 109.

<sup>245</sup> Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, 99.

officer in the club, Johnson went so far as to co-write “You’re All Right, Teddy,” which was used as a Republican rallying campaign song.<sup>246</sup>

After two consecutive and unproductive terms working for the advancement of black rights under the Democratic Party, and the NAACP’s miscalculation in its support of Wilson in 1912, Johnson appeared convinced that Harding presented African Americans with a better alternative for the upcoming presidential election.<sup>247</sup> Thus, by 1920, as executive secretary of the NAACP, Johnson was interested in securing a closer relationship with the Republican Party, and the Haitian investigation seemed to be a logical way of getting their attention. If Johnson could help them exploit the Haitian situation for political gains during the campaign, perhaps then once a Republican government was established in the White House they would reciprocate with support for the NAACP. While the Democratic Party had failed to bring an anti-lynching bill to U.S. Congress, it was possible that, once in office, the Republican Party would take up this urgent issue. Indeed, in April 1918, Republican Leonidas Dyer had presented an anti-lynching bill to the U.S. Congress.<sup>248</sup> Although the NAACP had initially battled with whether it should support this initiative (as there were concerns about the bill in its proposed form), as 1920 and 1921 would progress, they came to accept it.<sup>249</sup> With a Republican in the national office, the Dyer anti-lynching bill or any similar efforts to make lynching a federal matter perhaps stood a chance. A rapprochement with Harding was henceforth welcomed.

As Johnson later recalled in his autobiography, *Along This Way*, upon meeting Harding, the Republican candidate indeed viewed the opportunity of attacking the Democrats with the

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 208–209.

<sup>248</sup> Manfred Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 51.

<sup>249</sup> Robert L Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 54.

Haitian occupation scandal as “a gift right off the Christmas tree” and could not “conceal his delight.”<sup>250</sup> While this quote supports the idea that the Haitian situation became an important political tool for the 1920 presidential election, Johnson’s own recollection of events seems to obscure his much more active and interested role in using the Haitian situation to embarrass the Democratic Party. In any event, by the time Johnson began his investigation, the orientation of his project was well defined.

Johnson and Seligmann arrived in Haiti on February 27, 1920.<sup>251</sup> While Seligmann returned to the United States prematurely due to illness,<sup>252</sup> Johnson stayed on until May of the same year.<sup>253</sup> He met with Haitians of all walks of life and with U.S. Marines in order to get a “fuller” impression of the occupation. On April 13, 1920, he dined with the Haitian President Sudre Dartiguenave.<sup>254</sup> Aside from the capital of Port-au-Prince, Johnson’s investigation took him to various other parts of the country,<sup>255</sup> including Cap-Haitien and other Northern cities. He spoke to many U.S. officials who, when drunk, supposedly admitted to committing various kinds of abuses.<sup>256</sup>

Johnson’s Haitian investigation was transnational in nature and showed the extent to which the NAACP could, as an association, prepare a sophisticated project linking its New York-based headquarters to Port-au-Prince. Historians have stressed the importance of diasporic and pan-Africanist ties between African Americans and Haitians in part because Johnson was able to establish a network of connections in Haiti. As stated before, during his stay in Haiti, Johnson met

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<sup>250</sup> James Weldon Johnson and Sondra Kathryn Wilson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), 359.

<sup>251</sup> Hudson, “The National City Bank of New York and Haiti, 1909 – 1922,” 91.

<sup>252</sup> Twa, “Troubling Island,” 56.

<sup>253</sup> Hudson, “The National City Bank of New York and Haiti, 1909–1922,” 91.

<sup>254</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 82.

<sup>255</sup> Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, 204.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

with individuals from the Haitian bourgeoisie. For instance, he maintained a correspondence with Jean-Price Mars who, in the early 1920s, was considered one of Haiti's most important intellectuals.<sup>257</sup> However, Johnson's most important acquaintance was undeniably Georges Sylvain. Sylvain was a former Haitian diplomat and lawyer who had launched the Union Patriotique in 1915 to organise and respond to the occupation.<sup>258</sup> Unlike the *cacos*, who took arms against the Americans, the Union Patriotique was willing to compromise and called for peaceful negotiations between Haiti and the United States. Nevertheless, the association had been dismantled due to the strict censorship of dissident voices.<sup>259</sup>

Johnson's 1920 visit encouraged the Union Patriotique's reestablishment.<sup>260</sup> Johnson persuaded Sylvain to use the NAACP as a model for the reinstituted Union Patriotique.<sup>261</sup> Eventually, following Johnson's visit, fourteen different divisions of the Union were installed throughout Haiti, in addition to the one in the capital.<sup>262</sup>

Sylvain and Johnson thus shaped a critical alliance in 1920, one that was useful to both men. For Sylvain, it meant working with an influential African American with (perceived) power to bring forward the restoration of his country's sovereignty. For Johnson, it signified a key relation with an individual capable of keeping him informed with reliable information about Haiti and, in this way, helping to guarantee the success of the NAACP's latest campaign. For the rest of the summer, Johnson worked on his articles.

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<sup>257</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 111.

<sup>258</sup> Georges Sylvain, *Dix Années de Lutte Pour La Liberté, 1915-1925, Tome I* (Port-au-Prince: H. Deschamps, 195?), 4.

<sup>259</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 117.

<sup>260</sup> Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations*, 171.

<sup>261</sup> Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," 132.

<sup>262</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 117.

### 3.4 *The Nation's* Articles: Challenging the Discourse on Benevolence

Johnson's first article was published in August 1920, originally in *The Nation* and then in the association's publication, *The Crisis*. The series, which comprised four articles in *The Nation*, was called "Self-Determining Haiti," and took obvious advantage of the new language of self-determinism following Wilson's Fourteen Points.<sup>263</sup>

In the first article, entitled "The American Occupation," Johnson's gives his readers general information about the beginning of the U.S. intervention. He discredits the popular belief that the United States intervened to restore order and rather suggests that it acted out of self-interest and that it had been looking for ways to force the Haitian government into accepting an unfair treaty with Washington since at least 1914.<sup>264</sup> Indeed, wielding diplomatic recognition as a policy instrument, the State Department made clear to the newly installed Theodore Davilmar government (in 1914) that, unless it agreed to a treaty that would effectively guarantee U.S. control over Haitian customs houses, the United States would not support his regime.<sup>265</sup> As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, political instability in Haiti at that time was such that outside support was often essential to prop up governments that did not rule with popular consent. Johnson thus rightly points to the United States' interventionist tendencies in Haiti, which pre-date the

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<sup>263</sup> On January 8, 1918, Woodrow Wilson presented a new policy for international politics at a joint session of Congress. Wilson's philosophy was based on principles of open and fair diplomacy and, most importantly, on the right to self-determination for smaller nations. Although the message was largely concerned with the faith of newly founded European countries following the end of the First World War, Wilson's remarks created enthusiasm around the world for what many perceived would be a new type of diplomacy based on a truer sense of justice. The fact that Johnson chose to name his series "Self-Determining Haiti" was a clear reference to Wilson's hypocrisy in speaking about self-determinism of small nations while employing U.S. military power to occupy Haiti. For an analysis on the international impact of Wilson's idealism following World War I, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>264</sup> James Weldon Johnson, "Self-Determining Haiti: I. The American Occupation," *The Nation*, August 28, 1920, 236–238.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

occupation itself. More daringly, in the same article, Johnson accuses U.S. Marines for the deaths of “some three thousand Haitian men, women, and children,”<sup>266</sup> which Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, would later admit too.<sup>267</sup>

In the second instalment, named “What the United States Has Accomplished” Johnson argued that, aside from “the building of [a] road from Port-au-Prince to Cape Haitien, the enforcement of certain sanitary regulations in the larger cities and the improvement of the public hospital at Port-au-Prince,” the occupation government had accomplished very little in the past five years.<sup>268</sup> Johnson insisted that “the enforcement of certain sanitary regulations is not as important as it may sound, for even under exclusive native rule, Haiti has been a remarkably healthy country.”<sup>269</sup> Similarly, he maintained that, while the Port-au-Prince hospital benefitted from American investment, this did not demand or justify a military intervention.<sup>270</sup> On the improvements in infrastructure and the building of a road linking Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haitien, Johnson was equally critical and stressed that “it is doubtful whether the object in building it was to supply the Haitians with a great highway or to construct a military road which would facilitate the transportation of troops and supplies from one end of the island to the other.”<sup>271</sup>

The building of Haitian roads was a particularly controversial topic as the *corvée* system, a “form of conscripted labour that required peasants to work on the national roads,”<sup>272</sup> was utilised to recruit workers. In 1916, when the U.S. forces began road and infrastructural projects, many Haitian peasants were willing to participate in their own localities.<sup>273</sup> As time went on, however,

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>267</sup> As reported in “Developments in the Haitian Situation,” *The Crisis*, November 1920, 26.

<sup>268</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti: II. What The United States Has Accomplished,” *The Nation*, September 4, 1920, 265.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Michael R. Hall, *Historical Dictionary of Haiti* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 76.

<sup>273</sup> Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 96.

Marines began selecting Haitians more casually and coerced them to work for long periods of time.<sup>274</sup> Peasants began to fear Marines, since the possibility of being forced to work for little pay under demeaning conditions was a high risk. Schmidt argues that the revival of the *corvée* system under the supervision of the U.S. Marines was directly related to the resurgence of *cacos* resistance.<sup>275</sup> One of the most famous *cacos* leaders was Charlemagne Peralte who defied the Marines until 1919, when he was murdered in an ambush.<sup>276</sup> *Cacos* resistance decreased steadily after the death of Peralte, but left a bitter memory in Haiti. Johnson made much of Peralte's death in his second article and captured the distress it created in Haiti. In the end, Johnson's position in the article suggests that Americans had accomplished nothing valuable in Haiti and, on the contrary, were responsible for much misery.

In his third article, "Government Of, By, and For the National City Bank," Johnson continued his denunciation of the occupation, this time focussing on the role of the New York City Bank in the affair. As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, the New York City Bank was at the forefront of U.S. activities in Haiti. Perhaps with less perspective than time would have allowed, Johnson presents Roger L. Farnham, vice-president of the National City Bank, as the principal architect behind the U.S. intervention in Haiti.<sup>277</sup> Although Johnson's article lacks perspective at times, it nevertheless presents a compelling case for the centrality of capitalist interests in Washington's policies in Haiti. His article contrasts sharply with the image of Wilsonian paternalist benevolence of 1915 and presents a much more sinister exposé of Washington's dealings in Latin America.

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<sup>274</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 102.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>277</sup> James Weldon Johnson, "Self-Determining Haiti: III. Government Of, By, and For the National City Bank," *The Nation*, September 11, 1920, 295.

In the final instalment of his series for *The Nation*, Johnson took a break from his direct condemnation of the U.S. occupation and focussed on Haiti and its citizenry. In “The Haitian People,” he presents a romantic picture of the island and its people.<sup>278</sup> Far from being a thoroughly accurate description of Haitian life in the early 1920s, the article asked readers to imagine Port-au-Prince as a “city of the French or Italian Riviera.”<sup>279</sup> Containing its share of generalisations, the article contrasts with the manner in which Haiti was traditionally portrayed by U.S. travellers and the American press. This fourth article could also be taken as an indirect critique of the occupation by showing that Haitians were a peaceful people who inhabited a picturesque Caribbean island.

Just as *The Nation*’s articles entered more fully into public consciousness, Johnson also re-asserted most of his points in *The Crisis*. The September 1920 edition, for instance, included a long editorial piece entitled “The Truth about Haiti” where Johnson challenged U.S. motives for occupying Haiti and attempted to correct misconceptions about Haitian history.<sup>280</sup> For the remainder of 1920, *The Crisis* continued to feature developments on the Haitian situation and stressed the great importance of Johnson’s work.<sup>281</sup> Most of the U.S. press, which up to that point had supported U.S. activities in Haiti, began to change its tone and to demand clarifications from the White House.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti: IV. The Haitian People,” *The Nation*, September 25, 1920, 345.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “The Truth about Haiti,” *The Crisis*, October 1920, 217–224.

<sup>281</sup> In its December 1920 issue, the magazine proudly boasted that James Weldon Johnson’s work on the NAACP’s behalf gave the American public *the very first* exposé of “the murder, rapine and exploitation of the Haitians by Americans.” The same issue contended that the NAACP was directly responsible for changing American opinion about the occupation and that it could take credit for any future U.S. withdrawal from the country. See “Do You Know,” *The Crisis*, December 1920, 48.

<sup>282</sup> Lindsay J. Twa, *Visualizing Haiti in U.S. Culture, 1910–1950* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 23–24.



### 3.5 Building Bonds: Warren Harding and James Weldon Johnson

That Haiti should have become such an important issue in the presidential campaign of 1920 cannot be understated, as the Wilson years ended with widespread violence against black Americans in the United States. In this social and political context, the NAACP welcomed the advent of a Republican government that would, it was hoped, be more sensitive to racial questions.

Weeks before his first articles were printed in *The Nation*, on August 9, 1920, Johnson and Harry E. Davis, a member of the NAACP's Cleveland Board of Directors, met with Harding in Marion, Ohio.<sup>283</sup> By this point, Harding had been nominated by Republican National Convention to become the Republican front-runner. The principal objective was to get Harding to make a few pre-election announcements regarding the situation of African Americans.<sup>284</sup> More specifically, they asked Harding about his opinions on black American voting rights, as well as several additional issues, including "the abolition of government segregation, enactment of anti-lynching legislation, investigation of the conditions in Haiti, federal aid to education, greater apportionment of African American officers and privates in the armed services, and investigation by the Interstate Commerce Commission of Jim Crow...conditions."<sup>285</sup> Though Harding did not make an anti-lynching legislation a central issue of his presidential campaign, the Dyer bill which the association was interested in seeing progress, did not leave the presidential indifferent and therefore,<sup>286</sup> there were reasons to hope that he would take up the issue of lynching at a later time.

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<sup>283</sup> Megan Ming Francis, *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82-83.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 57.

Historians Pamphile and Plummer have argued that, by 1920, Haiti had become such a vital concern for the NAACP that the return of her independence was considered as urgent as domestic problems affecting black Americans.<sup>287</sup> While it is noteworthy that Haiti should be included in such a list, the timing again suggests that beyond pan-Africanist considerations, the NAACP understood the political importance it could have in the upcoming presidential election. Pamphile maintains that “Harding showed little interest in most of the issues [discussed on the August 9 meeting] except for the Haitian occupation, which he rightly saw as one he could exploit in his election campaign.”<sup>288</sup> This comment downplays the active role played by Johnson in the affair. It is possible that Johnson, understanding Harding’s desire to use the Haitian affair to attack the Democratic Party, was willing to supply Harding with information on Haiti in the hopes that, in return, Harding would pay greater attention to the association’s other concerns discussed at the August 9 meeting. Historian Robert L Zangrando, who has studied the NAACP “crusade” against lynching exhaustively, notes that Johnson was indeed “eager to capitalize on any legitimate possibility”<sup>289</sup> to work on the Haitian issue for future benefits.

Johnson placed great hopes in Harding, much like Villard and Du Bois had pinned their hopes on Wilson in the 1912 presidential election. Whereas Du Bois continued to preach the importance of political independence and cautioned black readers of *The Crisis* that they had “no obligation” whatsoever to any political party,<sup>290</sup> Johnson, as executive secretary of the NAACP, tried to establish more formal ties with Harding.

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<sup>287</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 111; Plummer, “The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” 126.

<sup>288</sup> Leon D. Pamphile, “The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti,” *Phylon* (1960–) 47, no. 1 (March 1, 1986): 94.

<sup>289</sup> Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 57.

<sup>290</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Political Conventions,” *The Crisis*, August 1920, 176.

A stronger alliance with Harding would have benefitted the NAACP beyond the immediate concerns of the August 9 meeting. Although the Tuskegee school<sup>291</sup> no longer posed much of a problem for the association, in part because Robert Russa Moton, who succeeded Booker T. Washington, was far less charismatic than his predecessor,<sup>292</sup> another concern was Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Unlike the NAACP, which remained convinced that blacks and whites could work together to destroy institutional racism, the UNIA reasoned that such a goal was unattainable and that blacks were better off working among themselves to gain political liberty.<sup>293</sup> The UNIA, therefore, presented African Americans with a bold alternative to the NAACP.<sup>294</sup> A stronger relationship with representatives in Washington meant that the NAACP could distinguish itself from other black associations. By developing closer ties with Harding and pushing for, among other things, the passing of an anti-lynching bill, the NAACP could establish itself as the unparalleled champion of African-American communities.

### **3.6 Using the Haitian Controversy: Haiti as a Political Tool**

Even before the publication of Johnson's articles, the Democrats had given him and Harding a great opportunity to work the Haitian situation to their advantage and to provide further cause for Johnson's investigation. On August 19, 1920, the *New York Times* reported that Franklin D. Roosevelt, who at the time was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was responsible for writing

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<sup>291</sup> The Tuskegee school was founded in 1881 by African American orator and public figure Booker T. Washington in Alabama. While the school offered important education opportunities for Southern blacks, as seen in this thesis, it was often criticised for its almost exclusive focus on vocational education and conciliatory attitudes towards race relations. For more information on Washington and the building of the Tuskegee school, see Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Volume 1: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>292</sup> Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 115.

<sup>293</sup> E. David Cronon and John Hope Franklin, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 192.

<sup>294</sup> Indeed, for most of the 1920s, Garvey and Du Bois were involved in a bitter ideological and personal feud until Garvey was finally deported back to Jamaica in 1927. See *Ibid.*

the new Haitian Constitution.<sup>295</sup> In a speech given in Butte, Montana on August 18, 1920, Roosevelt allegedly boasted being the author of the new Haitian Constitution.<sup>296</sup> Roosevelt had indeed been in Haiti in January 1917 while the Constitution was being drafted.<sup>297</sup> He reportedly declared that:

“You know I have had something to do with the running of a couple of little republics. The facts are that I wrote Haiti’s Constitution myself, and, if I do say it, I think it’s a pretty good Constitution.”<sup>298</sup>

This came at an inopportune time for the Democrats. Apart from his position in the Navy, Roosevelt was the running mate of James M. Cox, the Democratic candidate for the 1920 presidential election.<sup>299</sup> Harding’s response was not late in coming. In a speech given on August 28, 1920, in Marion, Ohio, Harding stated that:

“So many things have been done by the present expiring administration that no power on earth could induce me to do, that I can not even attempt to recount them. I may remark casually, however, that if I should be, as I fully expect to be, elected President of this just and honourable Republic, I will not empower an assistant secretary of the navy to draft a constitution for helpless neighbours in the West Indies and jam it down their throats at the point of bayonets borne by United States marines.”<sup>300</sup>

In his mention of refusing to “empower an assistant secretary of the navy to draft a constitution for helpless neighbours in the West Indies,” Harding was clearly making a reference to Roosevelt and Haiti. This was not the only time he would make use of Roosevelt’s alleged statement. In a speech delivered for Constitution Day on September 17, 1920, in Marion, Ohio, Harding was even more candid:

“It is admitted, even boasted of, by the Democratic candidate for vice-president [...] ‘You know,’ he said to the people of Montana, as his words were quoted by the press, ‘I have had something to do with the running of a couple of little republics.’ [...] To the best of my [Harding’s] information, this is the first official admission of the rape of Haiti and San Domingo by the present administration.

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<sup>295</sup> “Roosevelt Declares He Himself Had Two Until Last Week, Referring to Minor Republics,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1920.

<sup>296</sup> James Weldon Johnson to Warren Harding, October 18, 1920. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

<sup>297</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*, 110.

<sup>298</sup> As quoted in Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*, 118.

<sup>299</sup> Pamphile, “The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti,” 94.

<sup>300</sup> Warren Gamaliel Harding, *Speeches of Senator Warren G. Harding of Ohio: Republican Candidate for President ; from His Acceptance of the Nomination to October 1, 1920* (New York: Republican National Committee, 1920), 89–90.

[...] Talk about self-determination! Talk about American ideals! Talk about equal rights for small nations! Before confession of deeds such as this, what becomes of the smooth rhetoric of vaunted righteousness to which we have so long been accustomed?<sup>301</sup>

Roosevelt bitterly disputed the charge that he wrote the Haitian constitution, and historian Schmidt, too, questions whether it was possible for Roosevelt to have done so.<sup>302</sup> Whatever the case may be, the damage was already done.

Johnson was pleased with the developments in the Haitian situation. In a letter to the presidential candidate, dated September 21, 1920, Johnson stated:

“I see that you have finally gotten under the skin of the Wilson administration on the Haitian question. You have smoked them out and got them on the run and I hope that you will keep them running.”<sup>303</sup>

With the Haitian Constitution debacle and the publication of Johnson’s articles, in October 1920, the Wilson administration was forced to respond to questions about the Haitian occupation. The Democrats were baffled in trying to contradict Johnson’s allegations. Johnson expressed satisfaction that Harding had touched “on one of the weakest spots in the Wilson administration” and urged the Senator to “push the attack to the limit.”<sup>304</sup> In response, U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby and General Lejeune, Commandant of the Marines, offered a defence of the administration’s policies by stating that the U.S. had intervened in Haiti purely out of benevolence to restore order and that the U.S. Marines had executed their mission in the Caribbean island with great care.<sup>305</sup> Josephus Daniels, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, also intended to defend the Marines in Haiti,<sup>306</sup> but ultimately, perhaps realising that the controversy would not be silenced easily, ordered an inquiry into the Haitian situation.<sup>307</sup> The Naval Board of Inquiry, which resulted from

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 183–184.

<sup>302</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*, 118.

<sup>303</sup> James Weldon Johnson to Warren Harding, September 21, 1920. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

<sup>304</sup> James Weldon Johnson to Warren Harding, October 14, 1920. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

<sup>305</sup> Pamphile, “The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti,” 94.

<sup>306</sup> “Says Haitians Approve Our Actions,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1920, 2.

<sup>307</sup> “Daniel Orders Inquiry and Punishment,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1920, 1.

Daniels efforts, found that while there were individual cases of violence,<sup>308</sup> on the whole, Marines' presence in Haiti helped maintain peace.<sup>309</sup> The NAACP considered the inquiry to be a "whitewash" and called for a separate, more transparent congressional investigation.<sup>310</sup>

Harding was elected president on November 2, 1920 and Johnson's relationship with the former Senator continued. In many ways, the Haitian controversy, which started before Harding assumed office, provided Johnson and the NAACP with a rapprochement with the White House that other black organisations did not enjoy.<sup>311</sup>

Johnson's most significant meeting with President Harding occurred on April 4, 1921.<sup>312</sup> Apart from discussing the question of a congressional investigation into the Haitian situation, Johnson also hoped to convince Harding to make a clear statement against lynching and support anti-lynching bill efforts.<sup>313</sup> Johnson's insistence was perhaps responsible for Harding taking a stance against lynching eight days later.<sup>314</sup> In a joint session of Congress on April 12, 1921, Harding, urged Congress to "wipe the stain of barbaric lynching from the banners of a free and orderly, representative democracy."<sup>315</sup> Thereafter, at least four different bills with this objective were introduced in the U.S. Congress<sup>316</sup> with the Dyer anti-lynching bill continuing to gain traction.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," 133.

<sup>309</sup> "Knapp Finds Haiti Glad of Security," *New York Times*, November 12, 1920, 17.

<sup>310</sup> Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, 210.

<sup>311</sup> For example, Robert Moton of the Tuskegee school who met with Harding in February 1921 was shocked to discover that Harding had been ignorant of the existence of the Tuskegee school prior to this conference. Yet he knew about the NAACP, its activities and its executive secretary. See Richard B. Sherman, "The Harding Administration and the Negro: An Opportunity Lost," *The Journal of Negro History* 49, no. 3 (July 1, 1964): 156.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>313</sup> Francis, *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State*, 85.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Monte Akers, *Flames after Midnight: Murder, Vengeance, and the Desolation of a Texas Community*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 153.

<sup>317</sup> Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching*, 59.

### 3.7 After the Election: The NAACP and the Haitian Question During the Harding

#### Administration

Although, in many ways, the NAACP had used the Haitian occupation as a bargaining tool to establish a relationship with Harding during the 1920 presidential election, the organisation did not forfeit all of its activities on Haiti's behalf after this period. For instance, the NAACP maintained its collaboration with the Union Patriotique, and in February 1921, when Haitian envoys of the Union (Pauleus Sannon, Sténio Vincent and Perceval Thoby) arrived in the U.S., they were welcomed by Johnson.<sup>318</sup> Three months later, the trio presented a memoir to the State Department and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee denouncing the U.S. occupation and proposing measures for an American withdrawal, which the NAACP helped publicise.<sup>319</sup> In September, the NAACP founded the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society, which fostered further collaboration between the NAACP and Haitians.<sup>320</sup>

On the domestic front, the NAACP's relationship with Harding eventually deteriorated in late 1921 and until his death. Harding proved to be much less interested in issues affecting African Americans than Johnson had predicted. Despite the fact that, like Wilson, Harding had showed some early enthusiasm for a national Race Commission, Du Bois noted that nothing in this direction had been put in place by the current administration.<sup>321</sup> Even more distressing to the NAACP was the outbreak of bloody Tulsa race riot in Oklahoma on May 31 and June 1, 1921.<sup>322</sup> Sparked by allegations that a black male had sexually assaulted a young white woman, whites

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<sup>318</sup> Pamphile, "The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti," 97.

<sup>319</sup> The essential points presented by the Haitian group were reported in "The Haitian Memorial," *The Crisis*, May 1921, 18 and the final memorial in "The Haitian Mission to the United States," *The Crisis*, July 1921, 125–126.

<sup>320</sup> Director of Branches to Secretary of Branches, September 7, 1921. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 8.

<sup>321</sup> Sherman, "The Harding Administration and the Negro," 157.

<sup>322</sup> Francis, *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State*, 88.

attacked the black quarter of Tulsa, burning the place to the ground and causing the death of some 100 to 300 individuals.<sup>323</sup> Harding condemned the attack on June 6, 1921 while on a visit to Lincoln University, and some recent historians have praised the president's courage in speaking out about this delicate issue.<sup>324</sup> Yet, at the time, no plan to prevent further violence of this kind was adopted.

This change in the Harding/Johnson relation was also reflected in the treatment of the Haitian issue. In late 1921, the U.S. Senate finally called for an investigation of the Haitian occupation.<sup>325</sup> Medill McCormick, one of the Republican Senators with whom Johnson had been in contact during the 1920 presidential election and who had also been interested in how the Haitian situation could be used to the Republicans' advantage, was appointed chair of this Senate Inquiry.<sup>326</sup> Hearings began in August, and Johnson was asked to testify in November, where he restated the arguments he had made in his series for *The Nation*. Privately, however, Johnson admitted that Harding and the Republicans were only interested in Haiti so far as it could be useful politically.<sup>327</sup> In a letter to Ernest Gruening, who succeeded Villard as editor of *The Nation*, Johnson noted that "the Republicans...were so anxious about Haiti while it was being ruled under the Wilson administration"<sup>328</sup> but once it lost its political value, seemed not to care about the question of the country's sovereignty. Perhaps forgetting his own role in the affair in the past year, Johnson now felt that his services had been ill used.

The McCormick Senate committee, which interviewed individuals both in the United States and in Haiti about the conditions on the island, produced an impressive document, thousands

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>325</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 88.

<sup>326</sup> Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 119.

<sup>327</sup> James Weldon Johnson to Ernest Gruening, February 7, 1922. NAACP Papers Part 11, Ser. B, Reel 9.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.



of pages in length.<sup>329</sup> It recognised that some individual abuses had been committed, but rather than recommending an American withdrawal, it suggested reforms to the occupation.<sup>330</sup> Among other proposals, it endorsed the creation of the new position of High Commissioner, which was ultimately given to General John B. Russell.<sup>331</sup> Although some U.S. Senators, like Democrat William H. Kink with whom Johnson corresponded in early 1922, called for an end to the occupation,<sup>332</sup> the McCormick inquiry was generally seen as authoritative and final.

### 3.8 The Decline: Haiti No Longer a Priority?

Ultimately, the NAACP's involvement in the Haitian affair greatly decreased after 1922. Pamphile makes the case that the NAACP's stance against the U.S. occupation diminished in part because the McCormick investigation helped strengthen U.S. presence in Haiti under Harding.<sup>333</sup> Many other factors, however, can help explain this change.

First, on April 10, 1922, Louis Borno succeeded Dartiguenave as president of Haiti. More so than his predecessor, Borno was known for his particularly conciliatory attitude with occupation authorities.<sup>334</sup> Borno believed the U.S. intervention to be the sole way of uplifting Haiti from its economic backwardness.<sup>335</sup> His election and close relationship with General John B. Russell meant that the occupation was likely to continue. Such attitude from the Haitian head of state may have deterred the NAACP from engaging itself as eagerly as it had before.

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<sup>329</sup> United States Congress Senate Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, *Inquiry Into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo*, (Government Printing Office, 1922), <http://archive.org/details/inquiryintooccu00conggoog> (Accessed August 19, 2006).

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>331</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*, 124.

<sup>332</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 89.

<sup>333</sup> Pamphile, "The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti," 100.

<sup>334</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934*, 15

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

A second factor that can explain why the NAACP's interest in Haiti lessened after 1922 is that domestic problems once again became a priority for the association.<sup>336</sup> The NAACP continued its efforts to lobby against lynching,<sup>337</sup> despite the major setback it took when the Dyer anti-lynching bill, for which it harbored high hopes, was ultimately defeated in December 1922,<sup>338</sup> greatly due to the work of Southern Democrats and Harding's poor investment in the affair.<sup>339</sup> The timing of this defeat, may help explain the decoupling of the problem of lynching and the situation in Haiti. As even in Haiti, anti-occupation activities had decreased (again, thanks to the suppression of the *cacos* resistance and the recommendations of the McCormick investigation), the NAACP most likely saw little reason to persist in its condemnation with the same energy and strategy as before.

Third, Harding's unexpected death from a heart attack in August 1923 signalled the end of the entente between the president and the NAACP. While the Harding administration had been a disappointment in many respects, Johnson still had sway in the White House thanks to his relationship with the president. Johnson and the NAACP were not so lucky with Calvin Coolidge, Harding's successor. Within the first few months of his presidency, Coolidge appointed C. Bascom Slemp, a native-Virginian known for his efforts to keep the Republican Party white, as his secretary of state.<sup>340</sup>

Notwithstanding these general developments, the NAACP did not completely remove Haiti from its agenda after 1922. For instance, in 1923, it established a U.S. branch of the Union

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<sup>336</sup> Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 89.

<sup>337</sup> For a detailed analysis of the NAACP work to secure an anti-lynching legislation, see Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching* (1980).

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>339</sup> Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom*, 52.

<sup>340</sup> Levy, *James Weldon Johnson, Black Leader, Black Voice*, 272.

Patriotique.<sup>341</sup> Despite the limited impact of this endeavour, it could still be perceived as an ideological continuation of what started in 1920. In 1925, Georges Sylvain died, and the next individual to champion the cause of Haitian sovereignty was the historian and diplomat Dantès Bellegarde.<sup>342</sup> Bellegarde developed a relationship with Walter White (Johnson's successor in the NAACP) which in many ways paralleled that of Sylvain and Johnson. However, Bellegarde's stance as a career-minded politician and diplomat did put him at odds with Walter White at times.<sup>343</sup>

As mentioned before, Johnson's work for the NAACP also helped spark artistic interest in Haiti among African Americans. As the New Negro Movement flourished in the United States, especially in the early 1930s, black American painters, writers and scholars found much to celebrate about Haiti.<sup>344</sup> Some artists/scholars like Langston Hughes,<sup>345</sup> and Zora Neale Hurston,<sup>346</sup> visited Haiti shortly after the end of the occupation.

In the end, the NAACP continued to denounce the U.S. occupation of Haiti—mainly through the pages of *The Crisis*—until the Marines withdrew in 1934, although with a much different disposition than before. While NAACP involvement in the Haitian occupation did not stop after 1922, it generally lessened, and the occupation stabilised in the mid 1920s until the 1929 student strikes which helped precipitate U.S. withdrawal in 1934.

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<sup>341</sup> Jean-Louis, "Harlemites, Haitians and the Black International," 94.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>344</sup> For a discussion on this, see chapter 3 of J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

<sup>345</sup> Carolyn Fowler, "The Shared Vision of Langston Hughes and Jacques Roumain," *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no. 3 (October 1, 1981): 84.

<sup>346</sup> Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 228.

## Conclusion

On July 6, 1934, the newly elected U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited Haiti. This gesture was part of his Good Neighbor policy, a new political orientation which had begun largely under the Herbert Hoover Republican administration with a view to ending costly Latin American occupations and establishing more friendly relations between the United States and its Southern neighbours.<sup>347</sup> In a speech delivered partly in French,<sup>348</sup> Roosevelt announced that the last U.S. Marines would leave Haitian soil in August of 1934.<sup>349</sup> Consequently, on August 15, 1934, the U.S. occupation of Haiti came to an end.

The departure of U.S. Marines from Haiti did not signal an end to U.S. presence in Haiti as prior to his 1934 visit, Roosevelt had signed a series of accords with the Haitian leader, Sténio Vincent, which specified that American interests would continue to supervise Haitian fiscal institutions until 1941.<sup>350</sup> Hence, the final transfer of the *Banque Nationale de la République d'Haïti* (BNRH) from American to Haitian hands would only happen seven years after the American retreat.

For the NAACP, which had denounced the U.S. occupation of Haiti almost from the start, the news of the American withdrawal was met with enthusiasm. In its Annual Report for 1934, the organisation looked back positively on the part it had played in “stirring public opinion in the United States against the Occupation.”<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Donald B. Cooper, “The Withdrawal of the United States from Haiti, 1928-1934,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1963): 90.

<sup>348</sup> “Roosevelt Lands in Haiti: Delivers A Speech in French,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 6, 1934, 1.

<sup>349</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 230.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>351</sup> As quoted in Leon D. Pamphile, “The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti,” 100.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the vision of African American orator and educator Booker T. Washington prevailed in race relations. In 1895, he had delivered a passionate speech, now known as the “Atlanta Compromise,” wherein he sought to convince black Americans to put aside their demands for political rights and instead focus on vocational education and becoming useful citizens.

Although Washington’s philosophy was well-received by many white and black critics alike, his conciliatory view on race relations came under attack by a group of more radical blacks as lynching and disfranchisement grew in the South. W.E.B. Du Bois was among those who rejected Washington’s vision because, in his estimation, it promised little improvement of the conditions under which black Americans were forced to live. While Du Bois and other educated blacks organised the Niagara Movement in 1905, this organisation largely dissolved the following year due to internal conflicts and a lack of funds.

When progressive whites recognised that racial violence had reached unprecedented heights in the early years of the twentieth century, they proposed the creation of a new association comprised of both whites and black. Du Bois grasped on this opportunity, and, in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in New York City.

In the first years of its existence, the NAACP set out to win the confidence of African Americans by proving that it proposed a viable alternative to Booker T. Washington and his views on racial politics. Among its many early crusades were the tireless fights against lynching and, in 1915, it took a stance against D. W. Griffith’s silent motion picture, *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted black Americans in some of the most grotesque stereotypes. Later that same year, as the U.S. occupation of Haiti began, it spoke out against U.S. imperialism.

Although scholars have made much of the NAACP's interests in Haiti and have interpreted this as a manifestation of black solidarity, a closer analysis of primary sources reveals that, beyond the prism of colour affinity, the NAACP was very much concerned with domestic politics when it commented on the U.S. occupation. As Woodrow Wilson became president in 1913, the NAACP took issue with his policies. The Wilson administration introduced segregation at the State Department and adopted a general *laissez-faire* attitude towards problems that plagued black Americans. Despite an early inclination to work on improving race relations, in 1913, Wilson turned down an opportunity to bring forward a National Race Commission, which would have served as a basis for policy recommendations on questions of race. Moreover, although he had spoken of being the president of "all Americans" during his presidential campaign, it was clear by the end of his first mandate that his intentions did not extend to African Americans.

With the beginning of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, W.E.B. Du Bois—who was the NAACP's director of publicity and research and the editor of its monthly publication, *The Crisis*—linked U.S. domestic policies and the treatment of African Americans to its foreign policy agenda in Haiti. By making parallels between the situation in the United States and Haiti, Du Bois used the occupation of Haiti as a way of commenting on the Wilson administration's lack of political will to work for the betterment of African Americans in the U.S.

Du Bois' letter of August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1915 to president Wilson and his pieces in *The Crisis* from 1915 to 1919 give evidence of the link he saw between domestic and foreign policies. Although he publicly urged readers of *The Crisis* to condemn the occupation of Haiti, privately,<sup>352</sup> in his letter to the president, Du Bois tried to convince Wilson to embrace a more conciliatory attitude towards Haiti, as his policies in the black republic could be a way of proving that his administration

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<sup>352</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Hayti," *The Crisis*, October 1915, 291.

held no prejudice against blacks.<sup>353</sup> Ultimately, little came of Du Bois' appeal to Wilson, and a full-blown occupation proceeded. With the U.S. entry into the First World War in 1917, Haiti was almost absent from the pages of *The Crisis*, until 1920.

The resurgent interest in Haiti in 1920 can best be explained by changing dynamics both in local and international politics. In the United States, several factors, including the end of the First World War, the migration of Southern blacks and West Indian black immigrants to Northern cities, a greater rejection of the racial politics associated with Booker T. Washington, and a new-found sensibility of solidarity among black individuals across the globe contributed to a new atmosphere in which interest for Haiti could flourish.

While the NAACP generally denounced the occupation of Haiti in the pages of *The Crisis* from 1915 to 1919, after James Weldon Johnson became its executive secretary in 1920, the association adopted a much more complex and transnational campaign to condemn the violence perpetrated by U.S. Marines in Haiti. However, much like in the 1915 to 1919 period, NAACP interest in Haiti went beyond racial solidarity and was again tied intimately to domestic U.S. politics.

When Johnson visited Haiti in March 1920 and conducted an investigation that resulted in the publication of a scathing critique of U.S. activities in the island, his efforts were part of a larger set of strategies by the NAACP to gain visibility in the United States. The NAACP achieved various goals with its Haitian campaign between 1920 and 1922. On one hand, it forged an alliance with the Republican Senator Warren Harding, who presented his candidacy for the 1920 presidential election and was looking for ways to exploit a scandal about Marine misconduct in Haiti to embarrass the Democrats. On the other hand, the NAACP was able to draw attention to

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<sup>353</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to Woodrow Wilson, August 3, 1915, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 3.

itself as an association representing and defending black Americans in the United States, but also, as an organisation capable of safeguarding the integrity of black individuals worldwide.

Although the U.S. occupation of Haiti continued into the 1930s, the NAACP's efforts on the behalf of Haiti largely decreased after 1922. The association returned to its more immediate domestic agenda in the United States, as the political situation in Haiti changed with the election of Louis Borno as president. Ironically, the U.S. hold on Haiti strengthened during Harding's and the ensuing Republican administrations. In the end, though all NAACP involvement with Haiti did not stop after 1922, it did decline, and the occupation stabilised until the U.S. eventually departed in 1934.

While racial solidarity may have been a central issue for key black members of the NAACP, like W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, it was not the sole motivation for their stance against U.S. imperialism in Haiti. In making this argument, this thesis has offered a new outlook on the role played by the NAACP in opposing the U.S. occupation of Haiti during the 1915-1922 period, expanding on earlier remarks from historians like Mark Robert Schneider mentioned in the introduction. Hopefully, it has opened an original avenue for further research on the history of the NAACP during the Jazz Age.

By stressing the importance of racial solidarity beyond all other factors, scholars to date have downplayed the importance of domestic politics in the NAACP's attitude towards Haiti. In looking at Du Bois' efforts, or those of Johnson, it is clear that local politics never ceased to inform their critiques of the Haitian occupation. It is within a framework of interaction between local and international politics that this thesis is situated. As academic works focussing on exchanges between members of the "African Diaspora" become more in vogue, especially in Black Studies and Africology departments across the United States, scholars and educators alike should be



reminded of the great dangers of oversimplifying the past and they should refrain from viewing black solidarity as a static manifestation rather than a complex ideology informed by varying factors.

This thesis has explored only one instance of African American contact with Haiti during the period of the U.S. occupation. While numerous scholars have looked at the relationship between African Americans and Haitians during and after the occupation through personal relationships between black literary and artistic figures in the United States and in Haiti,<sup>354</sup> additional research could, for example, compare and contrast the NAACP's initial reaction to the occupation of Haiti to that of other black organisations, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The NAACP's rivalry with Marcus Garvey and the UNIA is well known,<sup>355</sup> but little has been written in comparative terms about these organisations' respective visions of black internationalism in the 1920s and how Haiti may have fit into their picture. Further research could also focus on black religious figures who were active in denouncing the occupation and their responses compared to those of the NAACP.<sup>356</sup>

Whichever direction new scholarship on these questions take, it should focus less on representing the past as a romanticised portrait of racial camaraderie, which fits with more modern narratives of diasporic solidarity. Instead, it should try to represent the complexity of black internationalism and the factors that informed its manifestations.

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<sup>354</sup> For various examples of this see Carolyn Fowler, "The Shared Vision of Langston Hughes and Jacques Roumain," *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no. 3 (October 1, 1981): 84–88.; Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011).; or even Anita Haya Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>355</sup> See relevant sections of Martin, *Race First*.

<sup>356</sup> Bishop John R. Hurst, the leader of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Port-au-Prince did write a small piece about the U.S. occupation of Haiti in the May 1920 edition of *The Crisis*. Additional research could be done to see if the visions of the NAACP's main black figures such as Du Bois and Johnson, and that of black religious authorities who at times collaborated with the association for various endeavours, varied on the question of Haiti.

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